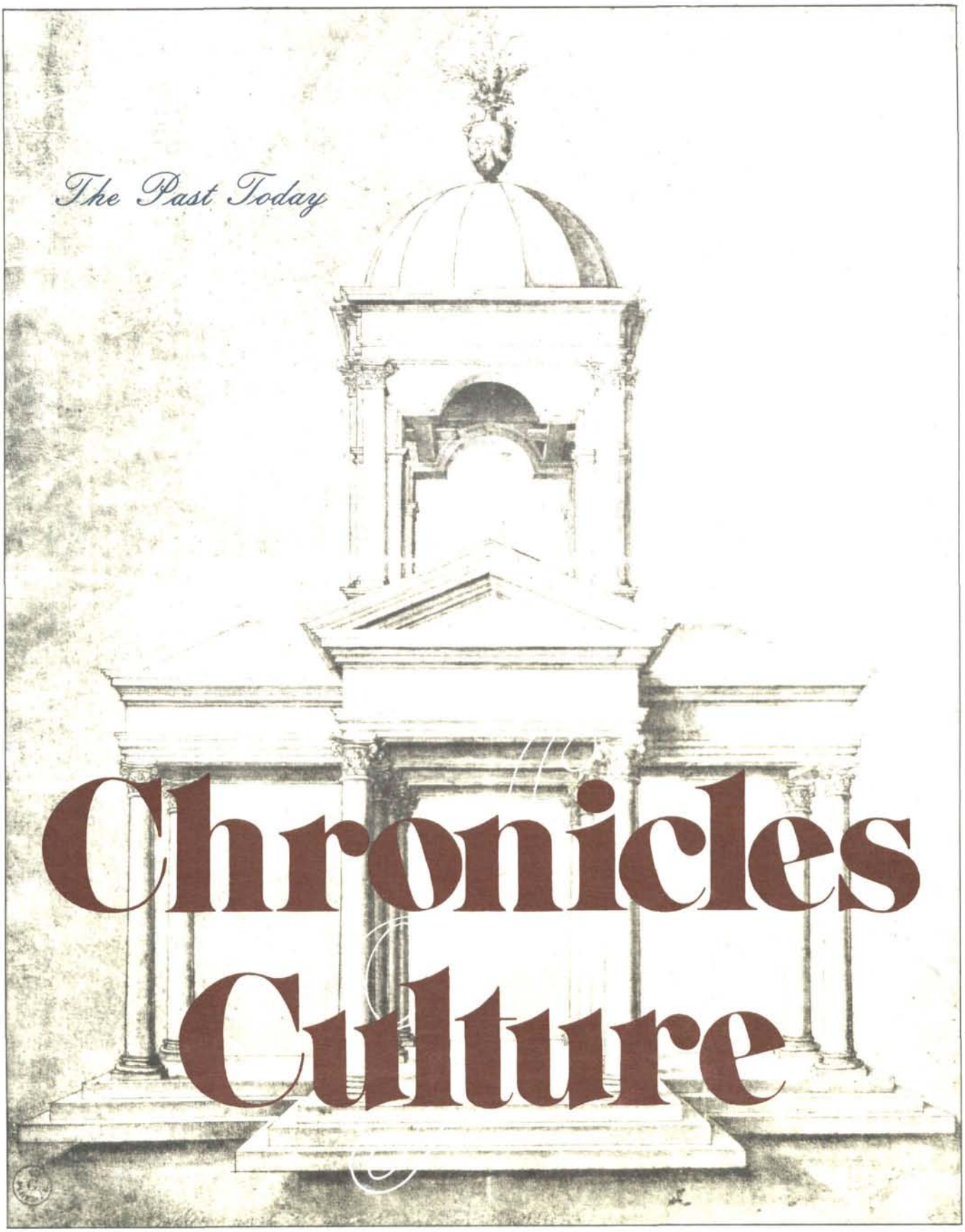
The Past Today



Chronicles of Culture

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Chronicles of Culture

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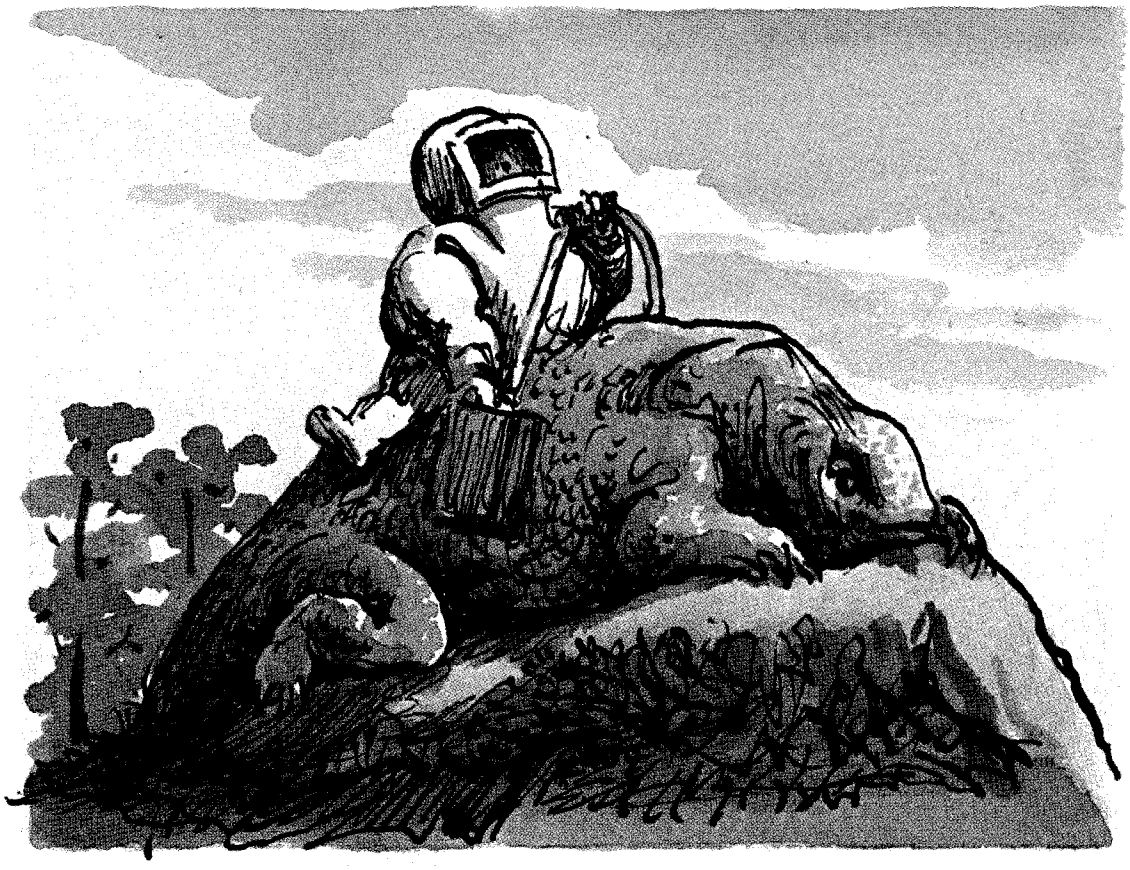
The Past Today



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COMMENT

"I can't live in the past": this is one of the apparently meaningless clichés that reveals so much about the way we look at ourselves. Of course, it would take a time machine to enable us to live in the past and even then it would be someone else's past and not our own. What we really mean by that and similar expressions is simply that we do not wish to think about the things that have actually happened—to us and to others—because it is infinitely more pleasant to live in the future, when just about anything could happen. It is strange, after all, how words like "past" and "old" have become terms of reproach, while "new" and "up-to-date" are synonyms for good. It is always hard to explain to Latin students that *studere rebus novis*—pursue new things—does not mean "make useful innovations" but rather, "plot damnable rebellion." Popular music provides the best comment on our attitude: while "Tomorrow" was the optimistic showstopper in *Annie,* songwriters like Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder used "yesterday" to sum up all the unhappiness and futility of their existence: "I believe in yesterday"—it has a tragic ring, even in the mouth of a cynical old roué like Sinatra.

This resentment of the past is something fairly new in the world. It is bound up with our being modern—a state we have been enjoying for three centuries. The comforting thing about being modern is that one is able to live in the future, without the least regard for all those previous generations of moderns, who are cheerfully consigned to the dustbin of history. Of course, it was not always so. Once upon a time most men took it for granted that all the best things—the stuff that made life worth living—were an inheritance from their ancestors, a rich accumulated legacy from the past. The future, so they thought, was a delusion, an infinity of disappointed hopes. And the present was but a mere hypothesis, the imaginary equator between the unreal future and the solid past. If a line were to be drawn, it was between the past, which was continually being realized in the present, and the always-receding horizon of the future. Even in the last century such people may have been in the majority. The country gentlemen who listened to Burke (or at least read him: no one actually seems to have *listened* to him), they knew that the future was very likely to be worse than the past. Metternich, in his own way an arch-conservative, was so resistant to change that he disliked having to write the date of a new year.

There are few like Metternich around today. *Conservative* now seems to mean progressive or even modernist. The past is now virtually a closed book, the refuge of historical novelists and down-at-heels academics. It elicits all the interest of a deceased millionaire after the will has been read. Everywhere we look the symbols of former ages, our concrete links with the past, are disappearing. In one generation the face of our greatest city has been changed beyond recognition. Buildings that New Yorkers once (with New York modesty) acclaimed

as masterpieces are casually turned over to the wrecking ball. Mark Twain, that greatest of American parvenu intellectuals, used to say that most cities in Europe needed a good fire. Such sentiments are apparently being carried out, albeit with greater caution, in New York. An occasional disaster at the right time and place can provide the opportunity for a great building project, as on the Athenian Acropolis. But the people of Athens did not, after a generation or two, raze the Parthenon to make way for a more up-to-date temple, much less an expressway to Thebes.

It is not just in architecture that we display our rage against the past. Even in our families—the bastions of conservative impulses—we are losing all sense of continuity with what has gone before. Rare is the son who follows his father's vocation or runs the family business: getting ahead is now what's important. Our children grow up with so little idea of the past that it is easy for them to think the world was created only yesterday, that it is a place where things can have whatever meaning we choose to give them. They are like the savages who might use a chalice for a chamber pot or scratch in the bean-patch with an imperial scepter. Homes—once the sacred repository of family tradition—are now what the realtor arranges for us to move into every three years, and grandparents—if they are known at all—are only people to "reach out and touch" by telephone. The hero of Peter De Vries's *Madder Music* reflects on the fact that his second wife had never met his father and that he had never met her mother; "Christ," he exclaims, "what was the country coming to."

We hear so much, these days, of the sense of fragmentation and alienation which has overtaken modern life, but the problem always seems to be posed horizontally: the loneliness of the 200-odd million individuals now alive in the U.S. Perhaps we are more disturbed by a vertical alienation: the dissociation from our ancestors, an affliction that always seems to be passed down—like a family curse—to subsequent generations.

Modernity requires that everything, especially works of the mind and of the imagination, be subject to fashion. For one

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reason or another, there are no more classics, no sets of books and principles that connect us—not just with each other—but with our civilized ancestors. The results of our intellectual fragmentation are far too serious to be summed up by glib superficialities like "two cultures." In fact, there is *no* central humane culture binding the student of the *Vedas* to the interpreter of Baudelaire. The trouble does not begin with specialization or even with the failure of our public schools. It is the rejection of tradition and contempt for the past that is at work. What every specialist scholar needs—if he wants to make his work serve anything beyond self-promotion—is an integrated vision of the past. Without some philosophical tradition, some common language of discourse, his work must remain an isolated fragment. This isolation is not limited to academic monographs; it extends to nearly every book on politics, ethics, psychology, and social life published in the last 50 years. Few, if any, are likely to be read 10 years after their date of publication. Why? The most obvious answer is that, whatever their individual merits, they are fragments: like unrelated bits and pieces of a puzzle which, if it ever is put together, turns out to be a Jackson Pollack painting without form or purpose.

No individual, given this sort of isolation can work out a coherent view of even a part of life. It takes order, system, or at least a set of common prejudices—in a word, tradition. Without it, his insights go unnoticed or, at best, land him a guest shot on a television show. Wisdom, usable wisdom, requires the experience of more than one generation. As it is, one fashion succeeds another, and sects blossom and fade with the regularity of the seasons: existentialists, behaviorists, Freudians, libertarians, etc., etc. Between them are no common principles or accepted methods; they share neither a mutually intelligible vocabulary nor even a commitment to a universally accepted logic. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that intellectuals have so little influence, even on other intellectuals.

Really useful systems—like those of Plato and Aristotle (or even of Darwin and Mendel)—are never finished. Each generation stands upon the shoulders of its ancestors. Even minor thinkers can make themselves useful by perfecting the system, while the occasional genius, an Aquinas or a Plotinus, can change the course of intellectual history. But for many moderns, all that building, all those living traditions have—outside of science—perished, and philosophy has been smashed into a thousand bright ideas. Intellectual isolation becomes as complete as social alienation. It is more than just an affair of the mind. The past is our world—or rather our world is the past. It cannot escape being diminished by this fragmentation.

—Thomas Fleming

Dr. Fleming is editor of The Southerner *magazine.*

The American Proscenium

The Cancer of Fanaticism

Over several months, the world's public opinion has conveyed the impression that the American government's Middle East policy concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict has been tilting markedly toward the Arab side. Wisdom and rectitude of such a bias notwithstanding, both the world and America soon had an opportunity to hear the thundering explosion of Arab/Islamic gratitude.

Still, those who call for even-handedness in the conduct of our affairs in that part of the world continue to maintain that the bestial, cold-blooded murder of defenseless Americans in their offices cannot and should not be seen as an indictment of a nation, a religion, a culture. But is that true? Perhaps some delving into the Christian European historical experience could contribute something to America's moral musings and verdicts. For 12 centuries, there has existed in Europe a deeply ingrained apprehension about everything Islamic; it is buried in the murkiest layers of European folklore. In the vast expanses from the Urals to Gibraltar, "heathen" was synonymous with "Moslem." Words like "Saracens," "Tartars," "Turks" stood for unforgivable savagery. Our entire concept of Western civilization, after centuries of evolution, rejects the idea of a collective evil determining a racial group, national entity, or social community, but this concept grew out of the fundamental belief in a God of justice, love, and mercy who imbues humans with a free will and a respect for otherness. The Islamic ethos went in a different direction. Arab nations and states, perpetually involved in fratricidal wars, seem to be guided by only one principle: the imperative to subjugate anything that's different from the values prescribed by their own tribal selves. We have come to see fanaticism as evil; they see it as a virtue and the merciless eradication of any independent otherness as their sacrosanct mission. This is exactly what constitutes Israel's predicament; it is well known to every child in Jerusalem, but it is insouciantly ignored by ideologists of the Bechtel school of political theory. The bombing of a diplomatic compound and the atrocious slaying of American typists in Lebanon may provide some illumination in the editorial offices of New York and in the State Department's conference rooms in D.C. □

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Trivialities & Flabbiness

Ann Beattie: *The Burning House;* Random House; New York.

Joyce Carol Oates: *A Bloodsmoor Romance;* E. P. Dutton; New York.

by Stephen L. Tanner

Ann Beattie succeeds brilliantly in what she sets out to do. But what she sets out to do is trivial. And this triviality is symptomatic of what is wrong with much contemporary fiction: style and technique outstrip theme and vision; means become ends in themselves. Since her stories began to appear in *The New Yorker* nearly 10 years ago, she has published three collections of short stories and two novels and has become a sort of minor cultural phenomenon. The stories usually appear in magazines before being published between hard covers; 10 of the 16 stories in *The Burning House* debuted first in *The New Yorker.* Her fiction strikes a peculiarly responsive chord and sense of identification among certain young people who graduated from college during the cultural upheavals of the 60's.

The response seems peculiar because her fiction contains none of the usual characteristics that generate a devoted following. It is not witty, dramatic, explicitly sexual, political, or animated by ideas or philosophy. Instead, it coolly but vividly describes young people—educated, upper-middle class, from the Atlantic states and oriented toward New York City—leading vacuous lives characterized by low-grade depression: lives of quiet desperation if there ever were such. The stories are full of disloyalty, irresponsibility, divorce, abortion, lovers, children shuttled between parents, drinking, being stoned, psychoanalysis, homosexuality, Valium, Librium, Dalmane, and Donnatal.

Dr. Tanner is a frequent contributor to Chronicles.

What is the source of her appeal? Part of it is the narcissistic pleasure that comes from seeing the patterns and values of one's own life captured on the printed page, regardless of how empty that life might be. Being the subject of fiction bestows significance upon a manner of living that otherwise lacks it. Beattie has a remarkable ability to observe and record detail and capture the idioms and interests of the people whose lives she describes. I suspect that much of her appeal derives from conspicuous name-dropping. *The Burning House* is like a *New Yorker*-approved guide for being chic. We can learn what is "in": the vogue books, authors, foods, cookbooks, restaurants, clothing fashions, cartoonists, artists, popular music and performers, boutique knickknacks and gadgets, leisure activities, and studied eccentricity. Beattie likes to read: "mostly modern fiction, nothing before 1960 if I can help it," and "a lot of magazines." Her husband forced her to give up *People* magazine for her 30th birthday; given her obsession with fads and fashions, it must have been a painful sacrifice.

As one probes deeper in order to understand the character of Beattie's fiction and its appeal to certain liberal-culture appetites, a centrifugal impulse in modern culture is exposed. Richard Weaver

(Ideas Have Consequences) identified it as a "flight toward the periphery." He envisioned a center of cultural unity, a realm of time-tested values, a sphere encompassing the fundamental human questions, the timeless truths. He described modern disintegration as a movement away from this center toward individualism and specialization: "In proportion as man approaches the outer rim, he becomes lost in details, and the more he is preoccupied with details, the less he can understand them." As the possibility for certainty about large human issues diminishes, the modern egotist grasps at the particulars. In Weaver's words, "They seem innocuous. Any extension beyond, toward center, may involve grave duties." The very possibility that timeless truths exist is a reproach to the life of laxness and indifference that modern egotism encourages. According to Weaver, liberalism mandates that we refrain from defining, subsuming, or judging; we must rest on the periphery and be tolerant of every manifestation of behavior. And the public is systematically taught to confuse factual particulars with wisdom.

The implications for fiction are obvious in Beattie's stories. The responsibilities of the writer are restrictively narrowed. A storyteller is expected only to describe particulars and feels not the slightest obligation to interpret, evaluate, shape, or perform other acts that would lead toward assertion, however tentative or subtle. No attempt is made to use fiction as a means of examining, testing, or actualizing any ideal radiating from the center. Beattie has said, "I've never written anything that I knew the ending of." She loves the notion of "found art": "Warhol soupcans—that kind of stuff." She begins writing and puts in what happens to register upon her consciousness. When asked if she is interested in larger themes, she replied, "No, I don't think I've ever written anything about a larger theme." Hers is writing on the periphery,

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accurate in surface detail, technically skillful and interesting, but divorced from any center of values and devoid of any synthesizing interpretive or evaluative vision. Wisdom, of course, does not lie on the periphery. Indeed, neither does accurate description that penetrates to any significant degree below the surface of human experience.

Anyone who reads much contemporary fiction knows that Beattie does not lack company on the periphery. When John Gardner asserted in an article and *On Moral Fiction* that moral affirmation is the most fundamental artistic value, that "a man writes a novel to find out what he can honestly maintain, not with his head but with all his nature," that "true art treats ideals, affirming and clarifying the Good, the True, and the Beautiful," his position was considered a radical heresy within modern literary orthodoxy and was summarily dismissed in liberal quarters. And even this lone voice was probably motivated as much by a desire to startle and provoke as by genuine commitment. In a recent posthumous article in the *New York Times Book Review,* Gardner backs away from his earlier position. It is true, as he says there, that in art a little meaning can go a long way, but the current vogue is to make a *very* little meaning go a *very* long way.

Joyce Carol Oates's *A Bloodsmoor Romance* illustrates another variety of writing on the periphery. This novel does dabble with themes and meanings and, through bludgeoning irony, conveys judgments; but I can't remember subjecting myself to a more intellectually and morally vacuous 615 pages.

Oates is a one-woman publishing industry. This is her 14th novel; she has done 11 collections of short stories, six books of poetry, two plays, three books of criticism, and a remarkable number of pieces in periodicals. *A Bloodsmoor Romance* suggests an answer to the obvious question of how she finds time to write so many books. In the case of this novel, it is a matter of selecting a few gimmicks and then pouring out unchecked, uncriticized, the flux of a fertile imagination.

Her principal gimmick here derives from Doctorow's *Ragtime;* she simply applies his method to an earlier period of American history. The story focuses on the late-19th-century family of Josiah Quincy Zinn and his five daughters. There is a parodic nod to *Little Women* and romances of the period, particularly to those of Hawthorne. The trick consists in bringing the family members into contact with the major historical figures and events of that time, while at the same time providing trivial period detail. The lives of the Zinn family touch those of such figures as Emerson, Edison, Twain, Garfield's assassin, Madame Blavatsky, Mary Baker Eddy, and many more. After the first 50 pages, the reader with the slightest knowledge of American history and literature can predict which people and events will be dragged in. Oates had to stretch to snare them all, as in the case of the people and events of the Western frontier. Her approach to historical accuracy is describing such trivia as what deodorizing substances women put under their arms, exactly how and how frequently laundry was done, what books were read and what songs sung, etc.

As in the case of *Ragtime,* the items of history come from headlines and popular history and provide little more than a caricature of American history. And the license taken with historical persons raises questions of taste and literary ethics. It is objectionable, for example, to see Mark Twain portrayed as a lecherous stage-door sugar daddy engaged in kinky sex with one of the Zinn daughters. Fiction and history are blurred further by the appearance of Henry James's Daisy Miller as a historical person. There is a cleverness in all this, but it gets out of hand.

A second gimmick is the use of the prudish Episcopalian spinster narrator. This involves many addresses to the "dear reader" and a tedious amount of authorial digressing, moralizing, and disclaiming. Elisions such as "confus'd" are thrown in to contribute to the period flavor of the style and diction. This narrative voice is the vehicle for heavy-handed and excruciatingly tedious ironic criticisms of Victorian morality and attitudes toward women. Oates stands up and knocks down a straw Mrs. Grundy so many times that eventually not even chaff remains. And to make an easy and obsolete target even more helpless, she exaggerates 19th-century prudery to a ludicrous extreme. We are told, for example, that one of the daughters:

> was never in that unfortunate state termed *nudity:* she was always partly clad while doing her toilette, and bathed whilst attired in a muslin gown, that she might be spared the exigences of her own flesh, the which would have certainly surprised and disgusted her. Even as a very small child, at an age when such anomalies have been known to occur, she had never sought to touch herself, and had, evinced very little curiosity, as to the morbid nether regions of her body: to her credit be it said!

She eventually makes the inspection and finds she has a six-inch penis. This kind of joke (and the book offers little more) wears annoyingly thin long before the back cover. The same goes for the narrator's frequent unsubtly ironic references to "frail female capabilities" and her own "feeble woman's brain."

Oates's self-indulgent excesses result in disconcerting inconsistencies. For instance, we are supposed to believe that the daughter just mentioned was an avid reader of Whitman. Moreover, the quaintly mid-19th-century narrator (she is really too archaic for the later decades of the century), though she ends her story precisely at midnight, December 31, 1899, informs us of events well into the 20th century. It is supposed to be the same narrator throughout, yet some chapters lapse into an entirely different and contemporary style and tone. In short, the implausibilities and loose ends are legion. And only part of these

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vagaries and incongruities can be defended as being part of the parody. Many of them result from carelessness and a cavalier attitude toward artistic restraint.

This novel is another manifestation of the flight from center. The retreat of certainty has paradoxically generated a renaissance of credulity. The implied reasoning works this way: Since we can't be sure of anything nowadays, all things are equally credible—flying saucers, conspiracy theories, cults, fad diets, *National Enquirer* headlines, parapsychological phenomena, in-search-of TV programs, and so on. And the renaissance is flowering in academia as well as among the masses. Fiction and history are equated; all texts are considered indeterminate in meaning. *A Bloodsmoor Romance* is a showcase for this retreat-of-certainty syndrome. It is filled with spiritualism, fantasy, implausibility, and the conflation of fiction and history. Fantasy has always been a frequent ingredient in literature, of course, but the fantasy in this novel and in much contemporary fiction is a new variety with a different source and motivation. Traditional fantasy achieves its effect by being recognizably distinct from the real and often clarifies and criticizes the real. In contrast, the fantasy in Oates's novel is an expression of cynicism, reflecting doubt about the efficacy of reason and the possibility for a criterion of truth, confusion in values, suspicion of all norms, and disillusionment with the question of meaning. And this cynicism accounts for the novel's lack of restraint: no foundation exists for a discriminating inner check upon a self-indulgent imagination.

Fiction on the periphery trivializes the function of literature. Today we require a literature that feels obliged to resist the centrifugal impulses of contemporary culture and initiate movement back toward center. Certainty, of course, is not given to man to possess, but the quest for it defines his destiny. To dissuade him from that quest is to strip him of his armor against despair. □

The Illusion & the Disillusioned

Jorge Semprun: *What a Beautiful Sunday!;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; New York.

Konstantin Simis: *USSR: The Corrupt Society: The Secret World of Soviet Capitalism;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

by Charles A. Moser

Jorge Semprun's book bears three epigraphs: from the Czech Milan Kundera, the Russian Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and the Frenchman André Breton. The quotation from Kundera best sums up the objective of Semprun's writing: "man's struggle against power is the struggle of memory against oblivion." *What a Beautiful Sunday!* is not so much a novel—although it is also that—as an essay in self-definition through autobiography (Semprun becomes the "novelist of oneself," in his phrase) and a profound meditation, likewise through autobiography, on the condition of modern European man confronted with the greatest aggregations of state power the world has known, systems which seek to expunge the memory of truth, the record of history, as a means of bolstering that power. For many years Semprun moved within the esoteric world of the communist movement, accepting its philosophical premises and its organizational discipline for the sake of its future promises. But now he has broken away from Marxism and added an impressive book to the list of those which can help us comprehend the mind of totalitarianism.

A Spaniard, Semprun emigrated to France after Franco's rise to power. He is perhaps best known for his film *Z,* a standard socialist-realist treatment of the government of the Greek "colonels" instituted by the coup of 1967 (very likely the choice of subject here was influenced by the horror Semprun's autobiographical hero in the novel feels at the British suppression of the Greek communist uprising after the Second World War). The film's artistic method, though familiar to audiences in the Eastern bloc, seemed a revelation to naive Western intellectuals, and the movie had a long first run and continues to emerge in American theaters. However, after the Prague spring of 1968, the clichés of *Z* yielded surprisingly quickly to the subtle but horrifying approach of another film, *The Confession,* about the Prague trials of 1952 (from the novel it seems that Semprun visited Prague in 1968 in the vain hope of photographing many of the places where that tragedy occurred). *The Confession* is both artistically skillful and politically powerful in chronicling the consolidation of communist authority in Czechoslovakia. Consequently it did not please the arbiters of our culture, and after a brief run it disappeared from view and is rarely mentioned. *What a Beautiful Sunday!* is in the tradition of *The Confession;* hopefully it will be as influential as it deserves to be.

As the novel opens, its hero, Gérard Sorel, a prisoner at Buchenwald, has left a group of his fellow prisoners on a December Sunday in 1944 to admire a tree, probably a beech, in the midst of a snowy field. Though a communist, Sorel is a man of independent mind and deeply European spirit, one always conscious of both spatial and temporal parallels. For instance, he emphasizes the irony that his camp was built on the spot near Weimar, the Ettersberg, where Goethe used to walk with his faithful Eckermann. Initially the camp was to have been named Ettersberg, but the National Socialist Cultural Association of Weimar protested that a place designed to gather

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the "dregs of the earth" would "sully the poet's memory" if it bore that designation, and so the sensitive Herr Himmler decreed that it should be rechristened Buchenwald, or Beechwood. And it is by admiring the beauty of the solitary beech in the snowy field that Sorel successfully averts the murderous suspicions of the camp guard who pursues him with rifle at the ready.

Semprun's novel is "modern," but not excessively so; indeed, it brings to mind Konstantin Fedin's early Soviet classic of 1924, *Cities and Years*. It shifts constantly through time and space, though always returning to the basic reference point of that December Sunday in 1944: forward to an automobile trip in 1960 from Paris to Nantua to Prague; back to the Spanish Civil War; forward to Sorel's expulsion from the Spanish Communist Party in 1964; further forward to a talk at Yale on April 11, 1975, the anniversary of Buchenwald's liberation, when he meets a young Polish woman whose father perished there. On another level, Semprun/Sorel imagines Goethe still walking the Ettersberg in the 20th century and conversing with Léon Blum, who had imagined conversations with Goethe; or Karl Marx still walking the streets of London and having to confront the results in reality of his manifold theories. The history of humankind is a string of repetitions, just as is the history of an individual:

> My life is not like a river—above all not like an ever-changing river, never the same, in which one could never bathe twice. My life is always a matter of *déja-vu*, of *déja-vécu*, of repetition, of sameness to the point of satiety, to the point where, by virtue of being identical, it transforms itself into something new and strange.

Using this concept of history, Semprun creates a work with constantly intersecting chronological and geographical planes. The entire book is written from the perspective of a man who realizes that the Marxist ideal to which he dedicated much of his life was false: "the justice," he recalls, "for which I thought I was fighting, was serving at the same time to justify the most radical injustices . . . the camp of the just had created . . . the Kolyma camps." He now knows that prison cells and labor camps are the truest material expressions of the totalitarian ideology, whether German National Socialism or Russian communism. And this explains something that initially puzzled Semprun/Sorel: the fact that the communists were a privileged caste in the prisoner-run administration at Buchenwald, and that the Russian prisoners generally were quite at home in the camp. Camps, he argues, are the "direct, unequivocal product of Bolshevism," and not only of Bolshevism but also, though less directly, of Marx's own doctrines, as abstract as they were in their original formulations. The Russian communists are convinced that history is determined by elites, and elites are much more intellectual than the common run of humanity; therefore, theoretical intellectual currents eventually debouch into the horrors of extermination camps like Buchenwald, where there is an ever-present trail of pale smoke from the crematories.

Semprun/Sorel is also an intellectual. He was converted from communist totalitarianism not so much by the reality he experienced as by the artistic vision of others. Chief among them was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Semprun/Sorel's life, he writes in a powerful tribute to Solzhenitsyn, "had been changed, invisibly but radically, by reading *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.*" Several other writers also influenced him, among them Varlam Shalamov, the author of several short stories describing the frightening reality of the Gulag.

What sort of memorial would be appropriate for the victims of the

LIBERAL CULTURE

Is Saul Also Among These *Prophets?*

Even in deeply religious societies, prophets have always been in short supply and typically have been ignored, killed, or imprisoned by the reigning political powers. Things are evidently different in modern New York City. There Jack Newfield and the director of the National Gay Task Force have found a politically potent force of millions of little Elishas thronging the streets. Indeed, Newfield could scarcely restrain his hosannas when he recently bestowed the holy mantle (refashioned in drag for his friends, we presume) upon the "prophetic majority" of "labor, minorities, feminists, gays, and liberals" in the Big Apple. This company of seers, Newfield presciently declared, is on the verge of miraculous triumphs:

> All that's needed now is good faith, mutual respect, and a programmatic agenda to unify the elements of this grand alliance.

We agree. Having recognized the need for good faith, we hope these latter-day oracles will study the declarations of Moses on sexual mores, of Jeremiah on the peril of leaning on the state, of Ezekiel on the blessings of repentance, of Malachi on the sanctity of the family, and of Isaiah on the doom of false prophets. □

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camps—whether they bear familiar German names or are lost in the Siberian wilderness? Semprun/Sorel rejects the "disgusting" ostentation of Bertolt Brecht's memorial at Buchenwald, with its facilities for "oratorios, works for massed choirs . . . public readings and political appeals." He recalls the splendid mausoleum of Lenin and Stalin (as it was at one time) in Moscow, where the two mummies were "lit up like fish in an aquarium," bathed in subdued music, and guarded by elite troops. No, he thinks, the proper memorial to modern totalitarianism would be quite different. It would be located in Kolyma, in the Great North:

> Galleries might be dug through the charnel houses—the construction sites—of socialism. People would file past the thousands of naked, incorruptible corpses of prisoners frozen in the ice of eternal death. There would be no guards; those dead would not need guards. There would be no music, either, no solemn funeral marches playing in the background. There would be nothing but silence.

That is the reality of the camps, brought home, finally, to Semprun through the power of Solzhenitsyn's and Shalamov's art, reinforced by other statements, such as Khrushchev's secret report of 1956 on Stalin's crimes. All this made it possible for Semprun/Sorel to liberate himself "from that madness, from that sleep of reason" induced by Marxist ideology. Now, he believes, genuine Marxism can exist only in non-Marxist countries, where practice does not negate theory. Communism and radicalism, he now sees, are "improbable" because "revolutionary politics is essentially a negation of reality, a creative, disordered overthrow of the legitimate order, the natural order of history." One might add, however, that this very improbability is a source of totalitarianism's external strength: normal people cannot believe that it is as it is.

Semprun/Sorel also thinks that the decisive intellectual battle over the nature of communism must be fought out among the left-wing intellectuals in the West. The much-less-numerous right-wing intelligentsia has, to be sure, understood the essence of communism from the beginning, but "they are, on the other hand, incapable of elaborating a concrete strategy aimed at the destruction of . . . Communism in its despotic form." Semprun/Sorel is probably correct in that assessment of the conservative Western intellectuals, though that is a sad commentary upon us. It is ironic that Solzhenitsyn, whose viewpoint generally coincides with that of the right, has so disrupted the ranks of the left; Semprun himself is a case in point. The right accepts and esteems Solzhenitsyn but does not act upon his insights; the left rejects and calumniates him, but it is through them that he exercises his greatest influence.

* * *

Konstantin Simis's *USSR: The Corrupt Society* does not move on the same level as *What a Beautiful Sunday!* Before emigrating to the United States in 1977 with his wife, who defended several well-known Soviet dissidents in the courts, Simis was a Moscow lawyer dealing mostly with ordinary cases. He has systematically gathered material to support his thesis that the contemporary Soviet system simply cannot function without bribery. One recalls Lord Acton's dictum, "all power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely," when Simis writes: "at the root of the general corruption of the Soviet Union lies the totalitarian rule of the Communist party . . . checked neither by law nor by a free press." Simis does, to be sure, use the word "corruption" in its materialistic sense.

Soviet ideology condemns commercial enterprise, or what we might loosely term "free enterprise," applying severe sanctions against it. One elderly man in Armenia was sentenced to 10 years in the camps after he was convicted of trading illegally in flowers in order to indulge his mania for collecting fine paintings and art objects. In the totalitarian system of the U.S.S.R. there is no place for individual enterprise of any sort, whether commercial or political. Simis systematically reviews the major areas of Soviet life in which corruption figures: the perquisites of the political elite, which lives on a scale beyond the wildest dreams of the ordinary citizen; corruption in the judicial system, under which verdicts may be blatantly purchased at almost any level; the world of underground "free enterprise," where certain families and individuals become fabulously rich by satisfying popular demand for ordinary consumer goods at the risk of long prison sentences or even death; and corruption in everyday life, an area in which Simis provides a number of examples from direct experience.

Simis concludes that the ordinary Soviet is not a moral monster: "he simply has two separate systems of morality," one applied to his fellow citizens, and one applied to the government, which officially controls the entire economy. There exists, then, a "parallel market" which operates in the shadow of the official economy, something resembling a free market, although badly distorted by the official market. What we would call bribes are simply payments for goods and services in the parallel market, payments generally much higher than the official prices for similar goods and services. The existence of this "parallel market" helps to explain how it is possible for a Soviet family with a total income of perhaps $200 per month to survive when food prices and the costs of many necessities of life in the Soviet Union are roughly the same as in the United States. Individuals and families simply operate within the system of thievery from work places, moonlighting, and "bribery," all elements of the "parallel market," which actually enables the official economy itself to work. Simis provides examples of honest and idealistic Communist Party members who set out to manage an enterprise strictly within the official system: they

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found it impossible.

In short, the ordinary Soviet citizen is a fairly decent person. As Semprun remarks, the communist rejection of the natural order and the imposition of a legal system based upon that rejection make it impossible for "capitalist morality" to function in the Soviet Union. Unhappily, either Simis or his editors did not understand this, or they would have refrained from equating corruption with "Soviet capitalism." For the "parallel market" in Soviet society is corrupt only in an abnormal sense: in a normal society, much of what Simis here describes as corruption would be seen as simply the fruits of voluntary bargaining. □

Rivals, Revulsion, and Resolve

***Witnesses to the Origins of the Cold War;* Edited by Thomas T. Hammond; University of Washington Press; Seattle.**

***The Sino-Soviet Conflict: A Global Perspective;* Edited by Herbert J. Ellison; University of Washington Press; Seattle.**

by William R. Hawkins

Great-power rivalry: in some progressive circles, mere mention of it is considered reactionary. The concept is something to be relegated to the history books with the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs. Liberals since the 19th century believe that modern times have vanquished the days of constant struggle, war, territorial expansion, succession crises, and imperialism. They are wrong. The "great game" goes on; only the players and their relative strengths have changed over time. The stakes remain high.

The centerpiece of contemporary global politics is the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. As Thomas T. Hammond points out in his introduction to *Witnesses to the Origins of the Cold War,* this rivalry has entailed the use of every technique of conflict except direct engagement of forces. The U.S. has fought Soviet proxies, allies of each have fought (as in the Middle East), each side has attempted to overthrow governments associated with the other, the Soviets have invaded border states, factions backed by each power have fought civil wars, both sides have intervened to protect friendly governments from insurgents, and there have been confrontations involving the show of force. There is a widespread feeling today that events may soon move beyond these "limited" actions to a major war involving nuclear weapons.

Contrary to mainstream deterrence theory, history indicates that the period of greatest stability occurs not when powers are equal. Parity leaves open to question which side is superior and tempts the more aggressive power to make an added effort to remove the ambiguity. This is particularly true in a system where one power has been playing "catch-up" with a dominant power perceived to be in decay. The use of the term "cold war" to describe post-World War II relations is interesting. A new term usually denotes something novel or exceptional. In the American experience, a period of permanent rivalry and tension is new; to the liberal mind-set, such rivalry is considered an exception, an aberration, to the "normal" peaceful relations between states. Thus there must be an explanation for it. Those seeking to provide one generally fall into one of two groups. There are the Traditionalists, who see in Soviet expansion—with or without an ideological motive—the cause of the cold war, and the Revisionists, who see the United States as the villain. The latter tend to have their perceptions colored by their radical ideology: they simply attribute evil intentions to the U.S. because it is a capitalist system and they apologize for or ignore Soviet actions. Traditionalists may be either liberal or conservative; the group is more varied.

Witnesses attempts to address the central issues of conflict between the Traditionalists and the Revisionists by bringing together 10 men who were active participants in American foreign policy during the 1940's and who have remained involved in government and academic research in the years since. The main issues addressed are: (1) were the aims of the U.S.S.R. at the end of World War II defensive or expansionist, (2) did the U.S. attempt to use its monopoly on atomic weapons to force concessions from the Soviets, and (3) what was the role of economic interests in American policy? The conclusions reached by the contributors and elaborated on by the editor support the Traditionalist position.

With the exception of George Kennan, all of the contributors were initially friendly to the Soviets as faithful allies in the war against fascism. This coincided with the fact that, except for Kennan, none had had any previous direct experience with the Soviets. With contact, they quickly discovered the Soviets to be secretive, stubborn, dictatorial, and generally unreasonable in their demands and conduct. Louis Mark, who was with the Foreign Service in Hungary, Karl Mautner, who served with the military occupation in Germany, and Martin Herz, who was with the Foreign Service in Austria, were particularly affected by stories of atrocities committed by Soviet troops, not just the isolated acts of rape and plunder committed by soldiers in conquered territory but the systematic acts of the Soviet authorities in looting economic assets for transport to the U.S.S.R. and the police tactics used to crush all political opposition to communism.

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American policy toward Eastern Europe was a mixture of naiveté and resignation. Roosevelt was sincerely opposed, in the Wilsonian tradition, to setting up spheres of influence—British or Soviet—in the Balkans. His hopes rested with the United Nations and democratic self-determination—a peace which would be stable because it was just. When it became obvious that the Red Army was going to impose a different regime and that nothing short of war could break Soviet control, Roosevelt accepted this without strong protest, hoping to keep good relations with Moscow so that cooperation could continue elsewhere. Recognition that the U.S.S.R. had valid security interests in Eastern Europe made this policy palatable.

The delay in realizing the extent of Soviet aims appears to stem from the fact that Roosevelt's liberal entourage could not envision the push for democracy in the East being considered a threat by Moscow. Moscow was naturally afraid of a renewal of fascism, but was not supposed to be afraid of democracy. While most of the contributors (especially Kennan and Richard T. Davies, who was in Poland) make the point that the Soviets wanted subservient communist neighbors, the further conclusion that Moscow considers democracy itself to be an enemy is glanced over. The implication of such a conclusion is grave since it supports the fear of many that the Soviets will never feel secure until democracy is extinguished everywhere in Europe. John A. Armitage, who watched the Soviets subvert Czechoslovakia, makes the point that Soviet ambitions extended far beyond concern for secure European borders. Czechoslovakia is not on the Soviet border, was not part of the fascist alliance but a victim of nazi aggression, and was not occupied by the Red Army at the time of the communist coup in 1948. The communist insurgency in Greece and the attempted Soviet expansion into northern Iran are other examples.

As for American use of "atomic diplomacy" to forcibly restrain Soviet influence, none of the contributors saw any examples of it. At most, the atomic bomb was a backup for the containment policy. Cyril Black, whose vantage point was Bulgaria, and Kennan are particularly critical of the atomic-diplomacy argument, Kennan supporting the opinion of Robert James Maddox that the Revisionist argument is based on faulty scholarship. The liberal-radical debate on "atomic diplomacy" has always seemed odd. The radicals claim that America sinned by using its advantage (or trying to) against Soviet expansion while the liberals claim that America was virtuous by not using its advantage.

One of the lessons Stalin is said to have learned from his experiences in the Russo-Polish War is that no one outside the direct control of Moscow could be trusted, not even other communists. This was due to the failure of the leftists in Poland to rise up in support of the Red Army in 1920. Stalin had an even stronger experience in this regard with Tito. This desire for direct control has been passed on to Stalin's heirs in the Kremlin and finds its expression in the Brezhnev Doctrine, in the Hungarian, Czech, and

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture*:

Conservative Wisdom & Modern Culture

"Whatever sublime virtue there is in our message, we have let ourselves be pushed out of the territory where wisdom turns into popular symbols and signals. We have proved to be thoroughly inept when it comes to locating and cultivating that delicate membrane which separates and yet connects culture and politics. It's in precisely this tissue that the philosophies of life germinate, where complex social conditions form a civil person and his moral imperatives, where, actually, the future of renaissance, normalcy, and free inquiry is decided. . . . Whatever we have to say must be turned into an upbeat message that will put less emphasis on capitalism's merits, . . . and insist more on our ability to formulate a pattern for a meaningful existential fulfillment—that is, a reevaluated philosophy of life."

—from the Editor's Comment
by Leopold Tyrmand

Also:

Opinions & Views—Commendables—In Focus
Perceptibles—Waste of Money—The American Proscenium
Stage—Screen—Art—Music—Correspondence
Liberal Culture—Social Register—Journalism
In My Solitude—Polemics & Exchanges

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Afghan interventions, and certainly in the break with China.

Several of the contributors to *The Sino-Soviet Conflict: A Global Perspective* trace the split between the two largest communist states to Mao Tse-tung's belief that he, not Khrushchev, was the true heir of the "socialist camp" after Stalin's death. The Soviet Premier, however, took for granted that the U.S.S.R. was the dominant power. This split, which ideologically widened as each center attempted to prove its claim in terms of Marxist doctrine, severed the only link connecting the two nations. As CIA analyst Paul Borsuk points out in his essay, there is no historical precedent by which to judge Soviet-Chinese relations. The two powers met in a haphazard way in an undefined borderland at a time when both governments were in decay. A period of wars and revolutions was followed by a brief period of cooperation lacking any real cultural, economic, or even political base. Not until the past two decades did the two powers face each other both as unified and independent states. The implications of this confrontation are explored in the collection of essays.

The assumption underlying all of the essays is that the Soviet-Chinese split is so serious that a rapprochement is not likely. The Soviets see the Chinese as a Mongol horde gone nazi, and the Chinese "social ownership" of the means of production as an elitist state ownership in the service of an overpopulated country seeking living space by expansion into Siberia. Soviet fears are reinforced by a race hatred. Chinese leaders believe that the Soviets will never accept an equal relationship with any other nation and that, if given a chance, Moscow would use the Brezhnev Doctrine to impose a compliant government on China. The movement of 700,000 Soviet troops to the Chinese border is deemed a greater threat than the Soviet nuclear arsenal. Chinese strategists consider the army as the only force that can occupy territory and dictate politics. Indeed, the militarization of the dispute, which has lasted for more than a decade, places the Sino-Soviet dispute on a level of tension which has no equal in Sino-American relations. (The Chinese do not consider the U.S. an active military threat.)

None of the authors see the military dimension receding; most of them include some discussion of open military conflict. Even the economic essays focus on the military potential of the Soviet and Chinese systems. Dwight Perkins of Harvard raises the controversial conclusion that China will reach something akin to military parity with the U.S.S.R. by the century's end. Perkins's case is based, briefly, on compounding. If the Soviet economy stays at its current three percent per year growth while the Chinese manage seven percent, the Chinese GNP will be 86 percent of Soviet GNP by the year 2000. If the Chinese follow the Soviet example of pouring most of this growth into military forces, they should gain superiority at least over anything the Soviets could afford to deploy in Asia. There are problems with this scheme. Perkins takes as his frame of reference the economic growth rates of Japan and South Korea. However, he does so without mentioning the fundamental differences between the capitalist economies of Japan and South Korea and the socialist economy of China. Even with reforms, China is not likely to free its economy to the point at which the full benefits of entreprenuerial enterprise can be obtained. Reference to the success of the overseas Chinese in Singapore or Hong Kong fails on the same ground. Also, if the Chinese do divert the fruits of growth to military programs as the Soviets do, they will suffer the same negative effects on future growth. The effect will probably be worse since the supply of scientists and engineers in China is smaller and the diversion of their skills more keenly felt. By Perkins's own calculations, if Chinese growth averages only five percent (still two points higher than Soviet growth) the Chinese will have less than 60 percent of the Soviet GNP by 2000 and the weapons they can build will still be technologically inferior to those of the Soviets.

The Chinese could buy modern weapons, but that would mean spending scarce foreign exchange needed to import capital goods and technology for growth. Jonathan Pollack of Rand suggests another option: "sit on the mountain and watch the tigers fight," meaning, hope for other diversions of Soviet efforts, such as heightened tensions with the U.S. or problems in Eastern Europe, or South Asia, or the Middle East, which would provide time for Chinese modernization. Chinese strength and reliability are central to the debate over U.S. policy towards China. The view that China is a powerful asset that might be lost if the U.S. does not make sufficient concessions seems at the heart of current policy. However, China also needs the U.S. if it is to modernize in the face of Soviet pressure. Sino-Soviet antagonism developed long before the normalization of U.S.-China relations. The diversion of roughly one-quarter of Soviet ground forces and tactical air power to Asia is important, but it also predates U.S. normalization with China. American leaders need to realize that they are in the stronger bargaining position. They do not have to sell out an old and tested ally like Taiwan in order to cooperate with Peking or to profit from the Sino-Soviet conflict.

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There is another danger, emphasized by Hugh Seton-Watson's concluding essay. The Soviets are overextended as an empire; there is unrest in Eastern Europe, Islamic revivalism to their south, the Chinese confrontation, and a stagnant economy. Further, the Soviets know that it is within the power of the U.S. to regain strategic superiority if the effort is made. Seton-Watson fears that the Kremlin will make the same decision that the German general staff reached during the crisis of 1914—that it is better to strike now than to wait, because to wait means to become weaker in comparison to one's adversaries:

> Defeatists will say, we (the U.S.) lose either way. If we don't rearm and don't arm China, the Soviets will surely win all over the world. . . . If we do rearm and arm China, the Soviets will threaten force or use force while they still have superiority. The realist will say, we can survive and win . . . if we use our resources, our brains and our courage to good effect.

The assumption that the Soviets will resort to force rather than reform or make concessions is supported by recent Soviet actions in Poland, Afghanistan, and Indochina. This is not the time, then, to cut back our political or military preparedness. The current situations are set to bring Great-power tensions to their peak. And as in the past, only strength and resolve will pass the test. □

Of Saints, Scientists & Supermen

Leszek Kolakowski: *Religion: If there is no God . . . On God, the Devil, Sin and other Worries of the so-called Philosophy of Religion;* Oxford University Press; New York.

Ken Wilber: *A Sociable God: A Brief Introduction to a Transcendental Sociology;* McGraw-Hill/New Press; New York.

by Bryce Christensen

Science is commonly regarded by modern commentators as a body of truths superior and antithetical to religion; few conceptions are more deeply ironic. Many astute scholars have concluded that science is the outgrowth of impulses fostered and defined by a Judeo-Christian theology in which the material universe is celebrated as a beneficent entity distinct both from the mortal men who inhabit it and from the transcendent God who created and governs it. While the pantheists of the East were bemoaning the multeity of creation and trying through meditation to achieve a mystical union with the All, Occidental religionists were rejoicing in the diversity of their Lord's creation as they actively examined its wonders. Hence, as G. K. Chesterton observed, the "almost insane happiness in the eyes of the mediaeval saint" who is "separate from things and is staring at them in astonishment" contrasts sharply with "the sealed eyes" of the Buddhist contemplative who believes "there is really only one thing, and that being impersonal can hardly be astonished at itself." It is therefore only logical that science and technology were chiefly of Western, not Oriental, origin and that most of the principals in the scientific revolution—including Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton—were fervent (if not always orthodox) believers.

Since the time of Newton, though, Western religion has had more difficulty with its heady offspring than David had with Absalom. Part of the blame for this estrangement belongs to religionists, especially those well-meaning Scholastics whose synthesis of scriptural doctrine and Greek thought was so thoroughgoing that scientists such as Galileo found it virtually impossible to attack the errors of Aristotelian science without appearing to attack Christianity itself. But far more culpable were the advocates of science who dogmatically sought to make themselves the sole purveyors and custodians of truth and to establish their empirical and mathematical methods as the *only* legitimate avenues to knowledge. The eagerness with which modern society seeks the opinion of scientists on various nonscientific issues—including religious questions—bespeaks the success of their endeavor. So while the Bible goes unread, magazine racks bulge with "scientific" pronouncements on God, man, and immortality.

Yet, as Leszek Kolakowski amply demonstrates in *Religion,* the acceptance of the lab coat as a substitute for clerical vestments is profoundly problematic and philosophically inconsistent. The popular understanding is that science rests upon a bedrock of knowledge and certainty (the word *science* comes from the Latin *scire,* "to know") while religion rests merely on faith. Careful examination of both attitudes reveals almost the reverse. Because, as Kolakowski observes, the scientific method provides "no tools which enable us to perform a miraculous leap from empirical data, however numerous, to infinity," its epistemological results are necessarily finite also: even its zealous apostle Bertrand Russell admitted that science could never give certainty, only probability. It is therefore only by an act of faith, faith in the uniform and autonomous operation of the physical universe, that atheistic scientists can posit the universal applicability of those descriptive and predictive mental constructs called physical "laws." That such faith is repeatedly justified in specific instances and thus is easy to maintain does not alter its fundamental character: it is still faith, ineffable belief, not absolute knowledge. Categoric denial of providential miracles, then, is rooted not in any scientific "proof," but rather, as Kolakowski notes, in a stubborn faith

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in "intellectual patterns . . . which simply cannot assimilate such an event as a 'miracle.' "

Most religionists, of course, profess merely the title appropriate also to scientists, that of "believer." However, prophets and saints—including especially those responsible for the scriptural teachings which incubated Western science—often claim certainty and actual *knowledge,* a "more sure word of prophecy," as the Apostle Peter called it. And because such prophets aver direct contact with the infinite mind of God, their claims have at least an epistemological consistency. Of course, claimants to divine revelation have often complained about the impossibility of adequately expressing their experience in finite language, have sometimes disagreed with one another—even within the Judeo-Christian tradition—and have provided no means for an unequivocal public verification of their message. Consequently, attempts to impose universal acceptance of such prophetic burdens have often resulted in inquisitorial persecution and protracted war. Until God sees fit to rend the veil and render apocalyptic judgment Himself, it therefore seems best to leave the evaluation of allegedly inspired testimonies largely to private conscience and prayer.

Unfortunately, however, many champions of science, with no consistent claim to anything but provisional faith, have arrogantly assumed the task of adjudicating publicly and absolutely all assertions of transcendent certainty. The terribly hubristic character of this adjudication is all too evident in social scientist Ken Wilber's *A Sociable God.* Despite the subtitle of his book, Wilber is miraculously certain that there really is no transcendent realm above nature, only terrestrial "transpersonal possibilities," and that therefore belief in and worship of God as an omniscient Father in Heaven is but "childish illusion, magic, myth" grounded in "wishful, defensive, compensatory belief, created in order to assuage insecurity/anxiety." Accordingly, he rejoices in the destruction of traditional religion by rationalistic science, which he sees as "perfectly religious" in that it is "necessary, desirable, appropriate, phase-specific, and evolutionary." The last adjective is a key term for Wilber, who believes, a la Hegel and Teilhard de Chardin (at whose altars he genuflects), *that mankind is evolving into a glorious* new race. More specifically, Wilber has no doubt but that men will progressively discover that "God" is simply "the crowning level" of our own potential "structural adaptation," with pantheist Hindu and Buddhist sages leading the way to godhood through their "yogic enlightenment." But if he is a professed disciple of the gurus of the Orient, he is also clearly in the turbulent wake of the Westerner Nietzsche both in his demand for a superman and in his expressed willingness to cast aside "society's norms" and allow the more highly evolved individual to "norm the norms" himself in an act of radical transvaluation.

Naturally, like a demi-Nietzsche, Wilber is irreconcilably at odds with Judeo-Christian revelation and hence either throws it onto a procrustean bed of reinterpretation (Paul's theophany on the road to Damascus was just a misinterpreted "peak experience") or peremptorily discards it as primitive "myth." The Genesis account of the Fall, recognized by Kolakowski as "one of the most powerful symbols" ever employed by men "to grasp, and to make sense of, their lot and their misery," seems especially obnoxious to the god-scientist Wilber:

> Postmythic men and women did not get thrown out of Eden; they grew up and walked out, and, now assuming rational and personal responsibility for a measure of their own lives, stand preparatory for the next great transformation: the God within, not the Father without.

The kind of being Wilber wants man to become is precisely "the man-god" predicted and applauded by the Devil in his conversation with Ivan in Dostoevski's *Brothers Karamazov:*

> 'As soon as men have all denied God . . . the old conception of the universe will fall of itself . . . and what's more the old morality and everything will begin anew. . . . Man will be lifted up with a spirit of divine Titanic pride and the man-god will appear. Extending his conquest of nature by his will and his science, man will feel such lofty joy . . . that it will make up for all his old dreams of the joys of heaven.'

However, if Wilber's vaunting rhetoric only suggestively reminds the reader of Ivan and his encounter with the Devil, Kolakowski makes an actual quote from Dostoevski's character the basis for a brilliant and lucid argument which, by contrast, makes Wilber's carefully diagrammed plan for man's evolutionary ascent to "heaven," with its explanatory verbiage of pseudoscientific jargon, seem like nothing more than the blueprint for a modern Tower of Babel. Using as his point of departure Ivan's declaration that "If there is no God, everything is permissible," Kola-

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kowski demonstrates with subtle and rigorous reasoning that if there is no God, there is no truth and everything is epistemologically permissible. What this means is that empirical science is not merely a faith ("it is vain to hunt for a godless certainty"), but an empty faith at that, utterly without philosophical content. "Science," Kolakowski proves, "does not deal with reality at all, its meaning being utilitarian, rather than cognitive." Thus "rationality" does not disprove the existence of a transcendent God, as Wilber glibly assumes, since it cannot "produce any compelling grounds for a definition of *Ratio* without employing criteria whose validity depends on the previous acceptance of this very concept." After Kolakowski easily exposes the view that traditional religion emerged from "a hypothetical archaic era" and a "pre-logical mentality" as a "false theory" resting not on empirical evidence but on "purely speculative contrivances," Wilber is left in the same unenviable position as the mendacious snake in Genesis: without a leg to stand on.

Kolakowski's discussion of science and religion, of course, is that of a philosopher rather than a proselytizer, so his interest lies simply "in elucidating the *status quaestionis* and in explaining why these questions matter," not in converting the reader. Indeed, he cogently demonstrates that the principle of *credo ut intelligam* makes both epistemological nihilism and theistic doctrine logically circular and therefore "empirically invincible." (Wilber claims his "spiritual knowledge" is "publicly verifiable" in an "empirical-analytic" sense, but when he specifies the "public" for whom this verification is possible as a "Zen master and the community of participant meditators" only a real superman can resist the temptation of a most uncharitable laugh.) Kolakowski does force the reader, however, to see that the circularity of religion circumscribes meaning, that the circularity of atheism bounds only the void of existential absurdity, and that the choice between the two is absolute and imperative: "either God or a cognitive nihilism, there is nothing in between."

Thus, though Kolakowski has no logical or scientific proof for or against the Resurrection, he can show that the doctrine of immortality is not merely a childish response to the fear of death, as Wilber facilely posits, but is metaphysically related to the very possibility of meaning both in time and in eternity. Similarly, though his arguments cannot be used to prove that Wilber is wrong about God's absence, Kolakowski does show that all supercilious assertion of human dignity in a godless world is truly an act of wish-fulfillment for two reasons. First, such an assertion denies the "ontological permanence" of "human infirmity." Because of his understanding of the abiding and near-universal sense of man's insufficiency, Kolakowski properly identifies the act of submissive worship as *the* essential element of religion and hence defines "the ontological nihilism of Buddhist sages" as merely a truncated "metaphysical and moral wisdom," not the acme of religious development as Wilber would have it. The second inadequacy of Wilber's atheistic vision of human dignity is even more damning: all notions of dignity or worth depend finally for their content upon the very transcendence that the dismissal of God necessarily precludes. Writes Kolakowski:

> The absence of God, when consistently upheld and thoroughly examined, spells the ruin of man in the sense that it demolishes or robs of meaning everything we have been used to think of as the essence of being human: the quest for truth, the distinction of good and evil, the claim to dignity, the claim to creating something that withstands the indifferent destructiveness of time.

For this reason, the announcement in the preface to *A Sociable God* that Wilber's book will help researchers "to move the psychology and sociology of religion to a new watershed" is appropriately glossed with the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." □

Liberal Culture

Sinus Delight & Computerville

Although we've been known to glance at the screen of our home computer on occasion and we do have a word processor on the premises to massage our manuscripts, we, unlike *Time* magazine, must honestly admit that the workings of microchips are a mystery to us. Now we know why. Says a recent press clipping: "Executives in California's highly competitive Silicon Valley snort a ton of cocaine a year, state narcotics agents said."

Small wonder that the famed cruelty of computer mistakes, which so often plague Social Security recipients and credit card holders, looks so inexplicable to normal, sober people. □

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Reclaiming Neglected Remnants

***The Horizon of Literature;* Edited by Paul Hernadi; University of Nebraska Press; Lincoln, NE.**

Gerald L. Bruns: *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History;* Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

Robert Scholes: *Semiotics and Interpretation;* Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

by Gary S. Vasilash

The title of a lecture presented by Edgar Wind in 1960 as part of the Reith series and a passage therein speak clearly to a state in contemporary literary criticism. The title: "The Fear of Knowledge." The passage: "Masterpieces are not so secure in their immortality as Croce imagined. If a contingency can bring them to life, a contingency can also reduce them to shadows: for what must be learned can be forgotten."* Mr. Wind asserts, correctly, that many modern viewers of art works—and this can be extended to readers of literature—are ignorant of what is represented, and so they misperceive what they are viewing. He thinks that a viewer should be knowledgeable about the work because "Inadvertently we trivialize the works of art of the past when we take them at their face value." Mr. Wind recognizes that what he recommends—that viewers recapture "a great deal of contingent knowledge"—is "burdensome," but he insists that it is necessary not only for the proper appreciation of art, but also for the creation of true art, not the marginal trivialities that can be seen in major art museums and found on the shelves of respectable bookstores.

*Edgar Wind: *Art and Anarchy;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York; 1964.

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The need for contingent knowledge is dramatically illuminated in a novel published in 1959 by Walter M. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz.* A word of caution is necessary at this point. The novel tells of events relating to the monks of the fictional Albertian Order of Leibowitz in the southwestern part of this country. The book has three main sections, "Fiat Homo," "Fiat Lux," and "Fiat Voluntas Tua," which tell of three distinct time periods. The first is set six centuries beyond the present; the last some 18 centuries hence. Because of the chronology, the book is commonly termed "science fiction" and is thus dismissed from serious literary discourse. The monks are very ordinary people; undoubtedly they could work as characters in a novel set from six to 18 centuries ago. In terms of literary conventions, the book is quite orthodox; I suspect that it is very Catholic in the religious sense because Catholic Digest published an edition of the book in 1960 and because the author ends his acknowledgement with appreciation and gratitude to "Ss. Francis and Clare, and to Mary."

A case for the legitimacy of science fiction as a literary genre is cogently made by Robert Scholes in an essay, "Stillborn Literature," that appears in *The Horizon of Literature.* Scholes, as will be made clear anon, is not a man with whom I always agree; I do concur with him in this case. Scholes's topic is the state of contemporary literature. He points out that should readers ask for complexity from writers, then they ought to be prepared to expend "an extraordinary interpretive effort" in order to understand the text. Especially since *Finnegans Wake*—to which Joyce thought people should unstintingly devote themselves—certain novelists have been creating novels which are increasingly cryptic, which might explain the rise of semiotic studies in the past few years: cryptanalysts are best suited to crack codes. Scholes says that he suspects "that the amount of satisfaction human beings are capable of deriving from language is . . . limited. There is a saturation point, beyond which no formal complexity can produce additional satisfaction." Should writers push further—"beyond the point where the coefficient of effort expended by the reader becomes greater than the coefficient of pleasure"—then it could result in "literary death." Those whom Scholes terms "competent readers" would undoubtedly be disinclined to study ciphers, as literature, I think, is supposed to provide some pleasure. Although the general state of literature is not one that can be characterized as being a collection of anagrams and other word games, there is an additional danger. Scholes maintains that "Orthodox fiction is losing its audience. It has become at once too easy to do it competently and too difficult to do it well." The following words are key: "It [orthodox fiction] is respected but not admired, praised but not cherished." What seems to exist, for the most part, are experimental works that aspire to incomprehensibility and the general run of things, products of authors who are more concerned with the bottom line and popular success than with making a contribution to that corpus of works which is known as genuine art. But if there are still some authors who are striving to create true literature, there are not many. Some of them write science fiction. There are too few for these to be dismissed out of hand. Of course, there is as much refuse—pseudosophisticated or highly salable—in that genre as in any other, perhaps more, but still, some science fiction, as Scholes points out, can be characterized as having "considerable beauty and intellectual richness."

So back to *A Canticle for Leibowitz.*

Walter M. Miller, Jr. posits a nuclear war occurring in this half of the 20th

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century: the event comes to be known with a biblical title, "the Flame Deluge" (all quotations are from the Bantam Books edition, 1961). The Deluge was followed by "the demons of the Fallout." Miller writes,

> So it was that, after the Deluge, the Fallout, the plagues, the madness, the confusion of tongues, the rage, there began the bloodletting of the Simplification, when the remnants of mankind had torn the other remnants limb from limb, killing rulers, scientists, leaders, technicians, teachers, and whatever persons the leaders of the maddened mobs said deserved death for having helped to make the Earth what it had become.

As in the early history of English literature, the Church acts as an ark wherein learning is saved. In the immediate post-Deluge period, one Isaac Edward Leibowitz, a former electrical engineer who lost his wife in the war, became a priest in the Southwest (the irony of the situation and the threads of Judaism, Mormonism, and Catholicism are themselves worth serious examination). He "won permission from the Holy See to found a new community of religious, to be named after Albertus Magnus, teacher of Saint Thomas, and patron of men of science. Its task . . . was to preserve human history for the great-great-great-grandchildren of the children of the simpletons who wanted it destroyed." Six centuries after Leibowitz's death at the hands of a mob, the materials that remain from him are known as the "Memorabilia." The monks preserved it, "studied it, copied and recopied it." But they don't know what it means. A memo book they have includes notes to bring home pastrami, kraut, and bagels: these words are signifiers without signifieds. One note reads: *"Remember—pick up Form 1040, Uncle Revenue."* The message is accompanied by some mathematics "followed by the word *damn!"* The monk who found the book "checked the figures; he could find no fault with the arithmetic . . . although he said he could deduce nothing about what the quantities might represent." That the figures had something to do with rendering unto Caesar couldn't be known to him. That monk comes to spend 15 years making an illuminated copy of a Leibowitzian blueprint titled "Transistorized Control System for Unit Six-B." What it means is unknown: perhaps it's a man-

dala of sorts. The monk sets out on a journey to the New Rome with the original print and his illuminated replica. A robber waylays him. The thief knows that one is a tattered piece of material and that the other gleams with gold leaf. He takes the latter. The "contingent knowledge" that Edgar Wind speaks of has been lost, even by the monks. (It is eventually regained—at great cost—and then Vico's cycle begins anew, signaled by the words "Lucifer Is Fallen.")

The artifacts from the days of Leibowitz must be situated in history—their history—if they are to have meaning. History, primarily because of Hegel and Marx, has become, for many, an inexorable force; man is nothing by comparison and his works are insignificant. History is thus ignored; only the present (or the future) is taken as the ground and object of observation. This is quite clear in the major trends of literary criticism of the 20th century. The Russian Formalists and the American New Critics set the stage. The former stressed the "autonomy" of the given work; the latter talked about the "verbal icon." What was given was given, period. There could be no recourse to authorial intention, nor could the literary work be placed in its historical context. Thus, a poem written by a madman 10 minutes before the analysis could conceivably be considered on the same level as a poem Pope wrote and held 10 years before release. While differing in terms of method and results, practitioners of subsequent -isms (e.g., structuralism, deconstruction) concentrated on the given words comprising a work. History remains taboo. A fairly current example is the work of Paul de Man. The preface to his *Allegories of Reading* (Yale University Press, 1979) opens as follows:

> *Allegories of Reading* started out as a historical study and ended up as a theory of reading. I began to read Rousseau seriously in preparation for a historical reflection on Romanticism and found myself unable to progress beyond local difficulties of interpretation. In trying to cope with this, I had to shift from historical definition to the problematics of reading. This shift, which is typical of my generation . . .

The emphasis on the "local" and the ahistorical is clear. The "shift" de Man speaks of leads to readings that are often interesting in the same way that Chinese boxes are interesting. Such critics produce texts that are similar to the works that Robert Scholes thinks will lead to "literary death." In many cases, the critical works are not fecund but sterile. The situation of this type of critic is like that of the monk illuminating the manuscript. When the monk is asked what it is that he is illuminating, he can only respond "Transistorized Control System for Unit Six-B." When he is asked what that is, he can only repeat himself. The monk is frustrated; the critic seems satisfied.

However, there is a trend toward humanizing criticism, toward putting the writer and his history, the interpreter

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and his history, and the reader and his history back into the picture. One critic who particularly concentrates on the writer and his time is Gerald L. Bruns. He boldly states: "For me, the history of interpretation is the history of writing, textuality, and understanding, which I take to be practices that make their appearance *within traditions*, not mental acts or constructions to be analyzed according to timeless models" (emphasis added). Bruns supports and practices what he terms a "rhetorical" approach to interpretation, which he opposes to "method," a practice that "tries to reduce rather than to amplify, for it wants always to determine what *cannot* be said in this or that case, and so by closure or the natural exclusiveness of its design it forbids all statements but those it can account for." Obviously, it can account only for the given words on the page—yet it even has problems with them. Bruns brings himself into a confrontation with philosophical methodology and the practice of much modern literary criticism: "From Socrates to Derrida the philosophers have always defined themselves by their opposition to what can be put publicly into words." Thus, these philosophers and critics produce cryptic analyses. Bruns practices a hermeneutical approach which attempts to bring "what is hidden into the open" through several strategies, including additions, revisions, and other inventions. Of course, Bruns does not put all philosophers into the same hermetically sealed boat. He dedicates *Inventions* to Hans-Georg Gadamer, a professor of philosophy emeritus at the University of Heidelberg and a visiting professor of philosophy at Boston College. Gadamer is a major theorist of hermeneutics; an emphasis on tradition is evident in his approach and in that of his epigones.

Gadamer's ascendency is quite evident. For example, *The Horizon of Literature* is primarily composed of essays that work toward defining the state of literature and literary studies. The subjects are wide-ranging, from poststructuralism to the ethics of editors in the editing process. The final 30 pages of the book are a section entitled "Humanistic Dialogue." It opens with a presentation that Gadamer originally presented orally (and subsequently revised). It is followed by responses to it. The final words are Gadamer's. His remarks conclude: "Hermeneutics, as the art of understanding, is realized in open readiness to listen and to learn." The word *open* in that sentence can be opposed to the "closed" methodologies of the so-called "Yale Literary Mafia" (e.g., de Man's). Interestingly, the same university that brought forth those struggling with "local difficulties of interpretation" is, through its publishing arm, also making Gadamer more readily available. Recently (February 1983), Yale University Press published a paperback edition of Gadamer's *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, which it initially brought out in hardcover in 1980.

Clearly, then, there is hope for history in criticism. But its reassertion won't be simple: Moderns like to think themselves to be highly sophisticated. Nor will it be easy: says Bruns, "there is no one more hateful to the philosopher than the rhetorician, who has his eye fixed not on systems but on the plenum of his inventory, because he knows that you must be ready to take everything into account in a world where nothing is predictable and anything can happen." Presently, the philosophers and the systematizers are in the dominant positions and they won't readily be dislodged.

One thing that critics and interpreters should do is to build their inventories, avail themselves of whatever aspects of schools or methodologies that they can blend into a useful synthesis. If Barthes, de Man, Derrida, Bruns, Gadamer, or whomever provides something of value within a larger context that may be valueless, then that nugget should be retained: gold mines, after all, consist primarily of useless dirt. Robert Scholes makes some serviceable recommendations in his *Semiotics and Interpretation* that should help make "semiotics" a part of the working vocabularies of all critics, teachers, and students of literature. Semiotics is the study of codes. Codes, as Scholes handily defines them, are nothing more than "the systems that enable human beings to perceive certain events or entities *as* signs, bearing meaning." He adds, "These systems are themselves parts or aspects of human culture." The before-mentioned Leibowitz deli list is a code that must be placed within the context of the culture that produced the code in order for it to have meaning. Scholes is opposed to the New Critics and others who attempt to divorce a text (Scholes uses *text* rather than *work* as he says the former is "open" and the latter "closed") from history and culture;

In the Mail

The World of Philosophy: An Introduction **by Robert Bruce McLaren; Nelson-Hall; Chicago.** A textbook that emphasizes that philosophers are people, too.

Art and the Wish to Die **by Fred Cutter; Nelson-Hall; Chicago.** The problem: presenting a book on suicide that people will want to pick up. The solution: utilizing over 180 works of art as illustrative material. The result: ouch.

Papal Infallibility: An Application of Lonergan's Theological Method **edited by Terry J. Tekippe; University Press of America; Washington, DC.** To massage a line from Alexander Pope: "Theology still, but Theology methodized."

Justice and War in the Nuclear Age **edited by Philip F. Lawler; University Press of America; Washington, DC.** Sense on the subject from a conference sponsored by the American Catholic Committee with religious and lay people including Most Rev. John J. O'Connor and Robert R. Reilly.

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even fellow semioticists incur his wrath: "No study of literature can be purely formal, and all attempts to reduce literary study to this level are misguided, if not pernicious. To the extent that semiotic studies insist that communication is a matter of purely formal systems, they too may be misguided if not pernicious."

Scholes is perceptive, but he pushes too hard. He puts culture back into interpretation, but he doesn't adequately limit himself. The code that one uses to create literature is simply a product of a given culture, Scholes insists. The one who performs encoding (the author) and the one who does the decoding (the reader) are mere pawns in his game: "neither the author nor the reader is free to make meaning." Meaning can be obtained, he says, by following his rules, which admittedly do include excellent points, such as examining a text in relation to others of its type. But authorial intention should not be ignored, nor should all coded texts merit full deciphering (i.e., critical explication) simply because they make a claim to fitting within a genre. For example, Scholes performs a semiotic examination of "Elegy" by W. S. Merwin. The so-called poem consists of six words; the combination doesn't merit repetition here or elsewhere: one performance of the text is enough. Scholes writes, "it could be argued that the more elegies one can bring to bear on the reading of this one, the better, richer poem this one becomes." And so he argues. It doesn't seem to occur to him that the more one knows about the elegaic tradition, the more banal Merwin's line appears. Scholes does recognize that some might think that he is stretching things out of shape, but he answers the charge with a comment that deflates all hopes one could come to have for him: "Am I pushing my interpretation too far? If you go in the right direction, there is no such thing as too far." Who decides on the direction? If individuals are as bound by codes as Scholes says they are, if readers are as encultured by codes as he claims ("The 'free' reader is simply at the mercy of the cultural codes that constitute each person *as* a reader, and of the manipulative features of the text, the classroom, and the whole reading situation as well"), then things are bleak. Those generating the primary codes in contemporary culture are politicians, advertisers, so-called journalists and analysts, and, to a certain extent, critics, including Scholes and those whom he derides. Thus, if they and they alone are entrusted with setting the boundaries for art, then art will only become more trivial than it was when Edgar Wind assessed the situation over 20 years ago. And critical discourse will sound like something created by the early monks of the Albertian Order of Leibowitz. □

LIBERAL CULTURE

Humanoids & Subhumans

New York magazine, the chief organ of humanoids, informs its readers that one Nora Ephron—a chic left-wing authoress and columnist for whom " 'the hang-up of my life' . . . [is] her small breasts"—has written a novel about her failed marriage to Mr. Carl Bernstein, the heavyweight champion of catch-as-catch-can journalism. *New York*'s résumé quotes someone saying: "They had the perfect life." We see this kind of life as glitzy-rotten, an effluvium of the liberal culture's putridity. What puzzles us is whether *New York* sees its in-depth story on existential trashiness as caveat, information, sensationalism a la *National Enquirer*, or as an exemplar enabling our youth to follow in the footsteps of humanoidal heroes. That is not made clear. What is distinct can be seen on the faces of the former Mr. & Mrs. Bernstein in a picture featured by *New York*: both protagonists' humanity is confirmed only by a tuxedo and an evening gown.

* * *

In the *Chicago Tribune*, we may read some factual self-assessments of one who is identified first as "Kelly, 23, college graduate, master's degree. Drug experiences: marijuana in early teens; cocaine." Kelly comments:

> 'Coke can be a sexual attracter. If I am at a party and talking to two guys, and one says, "Do you want to do some coke?" I'll go off with him.'

Kelly's by-line describes her as "a Chicago-based publications editor, living on the city's North Side." We wonder: What does she edit? A manual of conduct for 12-year-old girls? A newsletter about woman's dignity and sense of worth? A fashion magazine? □

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Movements of the Southern Tide

Larry McMurtry: *Cadillac Jack;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

Mary Lee Settle: *The Killing Ground;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

Alice Walker: *The Color Purple;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; New York.

Chris Segura: *Marshland Brace;* Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge.

by David A. Hallman

Southern writers must grow tired of hearing about the good old days when a race of giants stalked Dixie, pen in hand, to record the titanic struggles of history, race, and land. After all, it is depressing to be constantly held up, unfavorably, to a golden age which has acquired a patina of extra grandeur. And yet the literature our writers offer up today does more than suggest that a quantum shift in Southern sensibility has robbed the Southern writer of one of his greatest resources; it demonstrates the complaint as fact. Writers must work with the material at hand, and nobody would dispute that the South today is a far cry from the region that, say, the Vanderbilt Agrarians described some 53 years ago in *I'll Take My Stand.* Some have even argued that the South in 1930 was only distant kin to the image created by these poets, novelists, and academics as an alternative to the drift of the century. Certainly the Agrarian South, to the extent that it ever possessed a cultural mandate in the rank and file of the Southern people, has lost out to the leviathan of technological progress. John Crowe Ransom began his introduction to the Agrarian manifesto by announcing a kind of intellectual secession from the cultural Union; the essays, he wrote, "all tend to support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way." Allen Tate called for the Southerner to reclaim his tradition from the tyrant "by violence." But this late rebellion was quashed much more easily—if less completely—than the South's first attempt to assert its independence. In fact, the Agrarians' success was only literary. While the South at large clung stubbornly for a time to reactionary social and political ways, there was not enough heart and mind in its stand to defeat the zeitgeist. The siren song of the prevailing American promise proved too tempting to resist and too incompatible to assimilate with impunity to the consequences. It remained for the literature that the Agrarians inspired, or defined, to win the moral victory that justifies a Lost Cause to posterity; at least that seems to be the view of posterity in the 1980's.

But if the regional battle against the conglomerate passions of a New Deal, progressive America has been lost, then where can the contemporary "Southern" writers plant their feet? One of the traditional roles of the artist is to articulate—and even in extremity to create—the metaphysic or soul of his culture; until relatively recently it was assumed to be among the first goals of the writer. It bears restatement, then, that we understand cultural epochs less by their public history—i.e., political, social, military activities—than by the artistic record of those human vanities. If critics and general readers are to approach a writer as a German, or Latin American, or American, or Southern artist, then they must have certain expectations—if not of content and form, then at least of some perceptible link to the shared experience of that culture. If that ostensibly shared experience no longer seems available to our writers, even in the South, except in a strained and narrow sense, it is worth wondering what impressions future readers will draw about post-World War II American society from our contemporary writers.

Very little remains of the South that gave birth to the so-called "Southern Renaissance" in letters which sprang up after World War I and seems to have subsided with a whimper sometime between World War II and Vietnam. Old yeoman farmers now live in brick ranch houses with every technological convenience the suburban commuter enjoys, and rural farming communities in the South, stretched out along the back roads and highways alike, resemble nothing more than some spreading urban suburbias. The "New South" of Henry Grady has won on a TKO. Atlanta long ago set out to become the New York of the South, and other cities have followed suit. Memphis seems more a kind of fallen, sprawling Chicago than the river town where Faulkner's characters fled to have fun; Birmingham seems to evolve in the image of, well, *the* Birmingham. The problem for the Southern writers seems clear: how can they provide "Southern" settings for their works if the settings no longer make much difference? The answer, of course, is that the authors must not only choose their settings but make them significant as well.

It is probably wrong, and certainly unfair, to hold up the specter of William Faulkner as a standard for today's Southern writers. Wrong because Faulkner wrote in a different era about a different South, and because Faulkner was an inexplicable genius, the likes of which American fiction had not seen before or since. But can we properly appreciate and understand contemporary Southern writers outside the context of their literary tradition? Especially when one considers the great writers of the Southern Renaissance—Allen Tate, Katherine Anne Porter, Robert Penn Warren, Thomas Wolfe, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Eudora Welty, Caroline Gor-

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don, and so on—it seems clear that we cannot. Faulkner aside, something unique was happening in the South during the first half of this century, and a remarkable number of literary sensibilities responded to the challenge with an equally remarkable literature. Recent history makes it equally apparent that the Southern sensibility has been altered, that the magic moment of regional imagination has passed. The best Southern writers today depict a region that is less a country within a country than a relative once-removed from the patriarchal culture. Perhaps the last important writer to speak with a genuine Southern accent was Flannery O'Connor, dead since 1964. Walker Percy's novels would lose little of their power and wit if they were transposed to New England, California, or France. Such writers as Reynolds Price, Shelby Foote, Anne Tyler and—perhaps the finest living Southern author—Peter Taylor all explore a variegated South trying to balance tradition and change only *after* the decision to change has been irrevocably made. But if the term "Southern literature" is to have any meaning at all, then the literature must at least imply just what it means to have been a Southerner at a given moment in history. Recent literature suggests that nowadays the Southern experience means different things to different people, and four current works demonstrate the splintering effect that "progress" has wrought on the Southern sensibility as well as the tenacity with which some writers are trying to reclaim—or redefine—their cultural traditions.

Liberal Culture

May I Have This Dance?

Though they have trashed society's mores, it appears that homosexuals have not lost their affinity for its traditional social customs and forms. In a recent *Village Voice*, an organ promoting "cultural pluralism," we read an ad for a:

Gay and Lesbian
Dance at Columbia.

Intermission music, we presume, included such old favorites as "There is Nothing Like a Dame" and "My Guy." □

Larry McMurtry is best known for his portraits of the rural and small-town Southwest. *The Last Picture Show* and *Leaving Cheyenne* are perhaps the definitive depictions of his blear, disturbingly tangible vision of this milieu. But something funny seems to have happened to McMurtry on his way to posterity: he was "discovered," gave up Texas for Hollywood, and has now settled comfortably into the Georgetown area of Washington, where he owns a rare-book store. *Cadillac Jack,* his latest novel, reflects the author's restlessness; the novel's home base is the spreading D.C. area, but Jack (hardly a hero, or even a protagonist) takes the reader along in his pearl-colored Cadillac on a mad quest for Billy the Kid's boots through the South to Texas and points west, and then back again. The picaresque narrative satirizes both the Washington types and the "good old boy" culture that is behind much of the improbable action. Names of minor characters suggest the tone: Moorcock Malone, Cunny Cotswinkle, Oblivia Brown, etc. As if that humor were not broad enough, the 18th-century ribaldry is coarsened sufficiently to titillate any late-20th-century book-club audience. The human dilemma posed by *Cadillac Jack* is real enough. Jack, in his faithful automobile, is a drifter, an antique "scout" who roams the country buying and selling *things* for profit; he uses people as things also, though innocently enough, until he meets a young mother in the process of divorce. Struggling with his human emotions, he juggles the affair, along with some other less-promising dalliances, until—like some old Hollywood cowboy—he turns his back on the plucky girl, kisses his Cadillac, and rides off into the sunset. *Cadillac Jack* has its few moments and chuckles, but the novel makes a sad comment on the author's career: by leaving rural Texas for Hollywood and Washington, McMurtry's fiction has become like his "hero"—an art without a home. It is not reassuring to learn that his work in progress is set in Las Vegas.

In the Mail

***The Distinctiveness of Christianity* by James V. Schall; Ignatius Press; San Francisco.** Fr. Schall points out that Christianity is slowly dissolving as many try to show how it is similar to practically everything else. Difference is *the* thing.

***Center Journal*, Spring 1983; Center for Christian Studies; South Bend, IN.** Essays by Thomas Molnar and Marion Montgomery are included in this thoughtful journal.

***The Perilous Vision of John Wyclif* by Louis Brewer Hall; Nelson-Hall; Chicago.** John Wyclif (1328-1384) was kicked out of Oxford, had his writings burned, was thrice condemned (by the Pope, the chancellor of Oxford, and the archbishop of Canterbury), and had to contend with the Black Death. Moreover, he was exhumed three years after burial and burned. Perilous, indeed.

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Mary Lee Settle's latest novel poses a different problem. Instead of flight, it describes a return. Like the first four novels in her tortured exploration of a family history, *The Killing Ground* examines a mysterious death in the family's past. Hannah McKarkle has returned to her West Virginia hometown to try to discover the truth about her brother's violent death some years earlier, after he had been thrown in jail for drunkenness. The previous novels in the quintet examined family passings ranging from the Cromwell rebellion through the American Revolution, the War Between the States, and World War I. *The Killing Ground* leaves us dangling in the immediate present.

"[Mary Lee Settle] is a modern Harriet Beecher Stowe who would free us all."
—***New York Times Book Review***

If it is indeed unfair to compare contemporary Southern writers to Faulkner, it must be said that some authors ask for it. In Settle's case, the comparison has usually been intended as a compliment: reviewers call her work "Faulknerian" in scope, structure, and sensibility. Certainly her book is intended to be read as a Southern novel. The author's concern with family, community, and history are all part of the trappings of the genre. Even the old family manse, taken over by the nouveau riche, is included. Hannah McKarkle, who is presented as the author of four other novels which are—significantly, I am sure—the first four titles of Settle's quintet, is a kind of postmodern Quentin Compson. In Faulkner's masterpiece *Absalom, Absalom!,* Quentin is summoned by a local spinster—Miss Rosa—just before he leaves Mississippi to seek a Northern education at Harvard. "So I don't imagine," Miss Rosa tells him,

> that you will ever come back here and settle down . . . since Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man. So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe someday you will remember this and write about it.

Hannah, it seems, has accomplished what Quentin—the prototypical "modern" Southerner—could not face. She has liberated herself from her upper-class, West Virginia mining background, established herself in New York as an author, and returned to confront her past—and the fact that her brother's killer is a poor-white relation.

However intensely Settle may feel all this, her novel fails either to entertain or to enlighten. Her stature as a National Book Award recipient generally assures her some deference from the reviewers, even when they are uneasy with her work. But *The Killing Ground* does not deserve any particular awe. The novel's style is, well, just plain unsettling: much of this novel reads like a rough draft badly in need of an editor's blue pencil. The author's good intentions are not realized.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* adds another dimension to what we must now consider as Southern literature, but not many readers are apt to be comfortable with it. Walker's posture is unabashedly black and feminist (read lesbian). This epistolary novel consists of letters from two sisters who have been separated by fate. Celie, a semiliterate black woman living in rural Georgia, has been raped by a man she mistakenly thinks is her father. She is forced to marry a brutal older man and is generally abused by the oppressive, male-dominated world of the Negro South. Her sister Nettie escapes this trap by fleeing to Africa with a missionary couple who are raising as their own Celie's two illegitimate children. Nettie's letters to her sister are intercepted by Celie's husband, who doesn't want her to receive them; Celie's letters, never mailed, are addressed to God because there is no one else to confide in. Celie's voice is in what Walker has called "Black Folk English" rather than dialect, and it is a melodramatic record of Celie's abuse by ironfisted, male brutishness until she is lifted up to the joys of lesbian love by a glamorous blues-singer who is, for some reason, both available and attracted to Celie. The novel is filled with what Aristotle calls "improbable possibilities," but there is more to the book than a series of melodramatic coincidences.

An author could hardly limit her audience more deliberately than Walker does here. Almost all of the male characters are callous at best, usually worse. The women are defiant, courageous, and enduring. Faulkner's Dilsey pales beside Walker's Celie as a model of forbearance and pluck. But if the situations and characters are contrived, the author intends them so. Walker has called herself a "womanist," something she intends to include both feminism and lesbianism, and she does not blush at throwing these "ideals" in the reader's face. Rape, beatings, and de facto feminine slavery permeate the novel. In a *Washington Post* profile some months ago, Walker explained her anger:

"The Color Purple . . . places [Alice Walker] in the company of Faulkner."
—***The Nation***

"Her [Alice Walker's] gallery of women are living examples of man's inhumanity to women."
—***Commonweal***

> But why shouldn't I be tough on men? This is a country in which a woman is raped every three minutes. Where one out of three women will be raped during their lifetimes, and a quarter of these are children under 12. If I write books that men feel comfortable with,

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> then I have sold out. If I write books that whites feel comfortable with, then I have sold out.

As a reader who is neither black nor feminist, and certainly not lesbian, I can attest that Walker has not "sold out" in this novel. The most controversial of her themes develops as Celie begins to discover her lesbian liberation. In answer to Freud's question about what women really want, Walker's novel suggests that they have always had it right at hand, so to speak.

But *The Color Purple* is more than the sum of this drivel. If I call the novel a disappointment, I intend to pay a compliment. It is disappointing because Alice Walker can write, and some of the book is very good. Walker's ear for the rhythms and flavor of her black folk English can be astonishing. In Celie's letters to God there are moments of pathos that rise above the soap opera of the plot. But the passion of the author does her in, and ultimately she sacrifices truth for propaganda. Although neither literary history nor Walker's public statements offer much assurance of it, the author's obvious talent gives reason to hope that her art will grow and not contract.

Marshland Brace, apparently a first book by Chris Segura, a Louisiana journalist who has drawn two remarkably fresh and readable novellas out of the Cajun traditions of the Louisiana swamps, is a pleasant surprise. The Cajun culture is one of the truly unique traditions preserved in America, and it is remarkable that more writers have not recognized its literary potential. There must be others, but the only previous treatment that comes to mind is Longfellow's 19th-century sentimental classic *Evangeline,* which of course depicts the Southern Acadian origins and not the Cajun traditions. In Segura's book the swamps—or marshes—of southwest Louisiana beget a world of violence, passion, and hope. The dark depths of the swamps become a kind of heart of darkness where the characters discover their own strengths and resources and weaknesses. The first and lesser of the Brace, "Tranesse" ("Marsh Passage"), is narrated by an old trapper who had once pursued into the very heart of the swamp an old acquaintance who had murdered his entire family. "Tranesse" is exciting and readable throughout, but Segura makes his claim on our serious attention with the longer second work. "Les Perdues" ("The Lost Ones") is the familiar initiation story in which a young boy must pass from the innocence of schoolboy rivalries and romances into the mysteries and responsibilities of manhood. The ritual passage occurs suddenly when three generations of the protagonist's family, male and female, make their annual trapping expedition (of several weeks duration) into the depths of the marshes, and he is entrusted for the first time to handle his own trapping, so important to the family's existence. The family tensions, hidden at first, surface quickly, and the young man is drawn into the terrible secret he must finally share with his mother, his father, and his uncle.

Segura is almost completely successful in evoking a magical world with which few readers will be familiar. The physical reality of the marshlands is almost palpable, and the depiction of the Cajun culture is even more striking. The strong claims which family and region make on the characters, their very intimate bonds with a nature that both gives and takes, and the wonderful patois of Cajun speech are all rendered with authority. For readers to whom this musical American dialect is foreign, a sample should suffice:

> 'But you have to bathe, yes, Leland,' his mother said. 'Today is Palm Sunday, yes. And we all going to town, us, to get the palms blessed, yes. You too, and don't you know it, you. Mais, you going to stink the whole big church, you.'

I can only suggest here Segura's achievement in accomplishing what the best Southern writers have usually attempted. The author has vividly rendered the distinctive flavor of a regional culture while simultaneously raising his story to the universal and the timeless.

The object lesson of these four works is about the problems of writing within a regional tradition when the regions are hardly discernible. If the South seems to be the chief casualty of the Agrarians' doomsday prophecy, then the few remaining pockets of autonomous culture should be on guard. In the meantime, we should encourage writers like Segura who have taken the measure of their own little "postage stamp" of American soil. □

The Music Mask

Wolfgang Hildesheimer: *Mozart;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Daniel Dickinson

"There never was a good biography of a good novelist," F. Scott Fitzgerald once wrote, "there couldn't be. He is too many people if he's any good." The same might be said of composers, perhaps especially of composers. A novel, after all, is a form of verbal communication: within it we can find hints of the author's life and experiences, pieces of a puzzle that may or may not fit. But what does a symphony intimate about its author? Archibald MacLeish wrote that "A poem should not mean/But be." Isn't this also true of music?

In *Mozart,* German playwright and painter Wolfgang Hildesheimer tries to analyze the life of a genius who expressed himself solely through his art. "Our task," Herr Hildesheimer writes, "is to blot out existing ideas, but not to mediate be-

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tween Mozart and the reader. On the contrary, the intention of this study is to make the distance between both sides even greater . . . . between Mozart's inner life and our inadequate conception of its nature."

Who was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart? To his contemporaries, Mozart was many men: the "little man with wig and sword" according to Goethe; the child who dazzled court audiences with his neat suites and clever variations; the boon companion of the Viennese musical underclass who tossed off overtures between billiard shots; the uppity court functionary; the improvident spendthrift pleading for yet another loan. Only a few of his contemporaries, most notably Franz Joseph Haydn, recognized Mozart's genius. Unfortunately, before the world was convinced of his excellence, Mozart was dead.

It is through the haze generated by the Romantics that most of us have glimpsed Mozart. To the Romantics, suffering and genius were as one. In Mozart's tale, the Romantics found the perfect raw materials for mythmaking: a misunderstood genius, a struggle against a corrupt aristocracy, poverty, despair, an early death, and a pauper's grave. The Mozart legend quickly grew and gained acceptance. Kierkegaard suggested the formation of a sect to revere Mozart. Karl Barth proclaimed that the angels sing his arias. That this Mozart bore little resemblance to the actual man bothered no one.

Who, then, was the *real* Mozart? The answer is elusive, but it's clear that, artistically, he was neither the Romantic deity, the "correct" court musician, nor even the "little man with wig and sword." No doubt he was partly all of these things, and something more. While Mozart was poor, his poverty was at least in part due to his unwillingness to meet the demands of the aristocracy, and he certainly didn't dwell in a garret. Mozart lived well, even when he couldn't afford it. And although he believed himself to be equal to Haydn, (and both towered above all other composers), Mozart certainly had no conception of himself as the world-straddling *artiste*. Nor did Mozart feel that the demands of self-expression should necessarily precede those of making a good income. Speaking of his "Paris" symphony (#31), Hildesheimer says: "His main purpose was to please, and he did please." The same might be said of the bulk of his compositions. Even in those cases where one thinks Mozart is emoting, it is largely the result of craft. Musically, Mozart was a classicist to his bones. "The prototype of the great sufferer," as Hildesheimer points out, "is not Mozart but Beethoven."

And yet, if Mozart's form hardly fits the romantic attire his hagiographers have stitched for him, neither was he comfortable in the artistic straitjacket of a proper court kapellmeister. His disputes with his employer, the fatuous Archbishop Collerado, are legendary. Further, as an independent composer—especially in his last years—he strayed from producing "what was wanted," delivering instead unappreciated works that were more difficult—and better—than requested. He began to write for his own satisfaction, producing after what for Mozart was uncommon labor a series of quartets dedicated to his friend Haydn, and writing in an incredible six weeks his last three symphonies (#39, #40, #41), his supreme orchestral accomplishments. Mozart's operas

seemed to reveal a man somewhat uneasy in the role of musical entertainer. While such works as *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and *The Impressario* were simply superior fluffery, *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* both offered healthy measures of social criticism. The Viennese aristocracy understood—and stayed away. *Cosi Fan Tutte* and *The Magic Flute* went further; the first a stinging attack on sexual mores, the second an almost medieval morality play combining illusion, special effects, mysticism, and wonderous music to popularize the ideals of the Enlightenment. But even here, as is always the case with Mozart, it is possible to assume too much. Was the social commentary his own, or did it stem from the freethinking views of his librettists Da Ponte and Schikaneder? Given Mozart's reticence when it came to expressing political views, it seems dubious.

If Mozart the artist is elusive, Mozart the man must remain forever beyond the periphery of sight. Hildesheimer says that his death "is easier to imagine than his life, which . . . is shrouded in mystery and always will be."

It is in the area of finding the real Mozart through the smoke screens sent up by his biographers that Hildesheimer is, paradoxically, at both his best and his worst. When he attacks the critics he is on solid ground. For example, numerous of Mozart's proponents have rhapsodized about the composer's love of Vienna, Bernard Paumgartner going so far as to claim that "the city on the Danube embraced the storm-tossed artist with maternal arms." In fact, Mozart disliked the city and longed to make England his home. Vienna, in return, ignored his works, in effect destroying him. This self-delusion is apparent throughout the biographies. Whether the subject is his mother's death, the intensity of his religious beliefs, his alleged use of D minor to signal the tragic, or his relationship with his domineering but well-meaning father, the biographers all have a theory, an excuse, an analysis of

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what Mozart thought and felt. But the effort is for naught. Mozart never made public his true feelings. So ultimately, his chroniclers can tell us nothing of his real values; they can only hold a mirror up to themselves, creating in Mozart a portrait of their own experience.

Unfortunately, Hildesheimer cannot resist the temptation to add a few brush strokes of his own. He studies Mozart with the depressingly familiar clichés of psychology and modernism. Having castigated one biographer for stating that Mozart was "the glory of Catholicism," he goes on to inform us: "Certainly Mozart was a believer, in that his mental life was never given over to the critical examination of God, to doubts or denials." A surprising statement coming from a man who has just devoted 300 pages to the concept that we can make no such assumptions about the substance of Mozart's emotional experiences. Exploring *The Magic Flute*, Hildesheimer tells us that a line in it "acquires meaning only through music . . . . it is a non-verbal existential statement." One wonders what Mozart would have made of such an interpretation.

Hildesheimer gets it right when he says that Mozart was, in essence, "an unearned gift to humanity, nature's unique, unmatched, and probably unmatchable work of art." Like that other great gift, grace, Mozart cannot be explained. He should be simply accepted with gratitude. □

The Importance of Being Cute

Edmund White: *A Boy's Own Story;* E. P. Dutton; New York.

John Updike: *Bech is Back;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

Stanley Elkin: *George Mills;* E. P. Dutton; New York.

by Gregory Wolfe

The latest offerings of Edmund White, John Updike, and Stanley Elkin are rather sad reminders of Coleridge's pertinent distinction between imagination and fancy. Imagination, Coleridge held, is an act of creation in which form is fully integrated with the reality it seeks to represent. Fancy, on the other hand, employs fixed images and ideas which are clapped together. Works of fancy, though they can be pleasing, tend to break down into their constituent parts; these novels of White, Updike, and Elkin, in attempting to explore homosexuality, the role of the author in society, and the so-called "working class," tend to crumble into the dust of liberal clichés, becoming fragments of a banal yet all-pervasive zeitgeist. Picking up the pieces can be interesting, but it is no substitute for encountering a work of art.

Edmund White has been cooed over by several of the current literary elite, including Gore Vidal, William Burroughs, and Susan Sontag. In addition to two previous novels, White is the coauthor of *The Joy of Gay Sex* and author of *States of Desire: Travels in Gay America.* Burroughs's absurd comparison of White to Tocqueville indicates the vested interest liberals have in the homosexual community; it is a counterculture oppressed by obscurantist moral and social values, but potentially destructive of those values. *A Boy's Own Story* is a homosexual *Bildungsroman,* a first-person narrative which supposedly presents an admirable young homosexual's initiation into "adulthood." White depicts the protagonist as a full-fledged homosexual by the age of ten, without so much as a question as to what human norms might be. Thus, at the start there's an artistic failure sufficient in itself to doom the novel, but there is more.

A Boy's Own Story is a novel-as-wish-fulfillment. It is merely a thesis clothed as fiction. White's world is a Hobbesian one in which sexual lust is the ruling passion: everybody does it to everybody else, without discrimination based on age or gender (this is what Sontag calls White's "convincing sensuality"). As the hero grows older, White provides him with two escape hatches from homosexuality: psychoanalysis and orthodox Christianity. The satire of the successful analyst—who is in reality a drug-taking psychological wreck—is vapid and facile; this option is quickly discarded. But White leaves the temptation to Christianity till the structurally significant end of the book. The hero meets the Scotts, a young couple who teach at his school, and becomes fascinated by their intellectual Christianity: they read and discuss Dante, Donne, Eliot, and C. S. Lewis. For a time the hero is intrigued by the "high static relief of allegory" which

"Edmund White is to be envied . . . . [He] has staked himself a distinguished claim in the rocky territory called desire."

—***The Nation***

"'A Boy's Own Story' has a compelling exactitude . . . . [White] achieves a wonderfully poised fiction."

—***New York Times Book Review***

"What's wrong [with *A Boy's Own Story*] is also right . . . . ultimately there can be an androgyny . . . . I hope so . . . . Sexuality is pretty rock-bottom stuff."

—***Village Voice***

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faith gives to ordinary life, but he decides against it, choosing instead the realm of "freedom" and "reality." White's critique is cheap and evasive: he shows the Scotts to be hypocritical, governed by the same Hobbesian passions as everyone else in this mélange.

The conclusion of *A Boy's Own Story* makes explicit the disturbing logic underlying the novel's action. The hero (he never gets a name: presumably he is something of a homosexual Everyman) is initiated into "adulthood" by a final symbolic act: he gives sexual gratification to a pot-smoking teacher against whom he has secretly informed with the idea of getting him dismissed. It is an act of absolute power over another, a way of getting back at the men who refuse to love him. This is exactly paralleled in the way White concludes the story: just as the title is a parody of the Victorian/Edwardian boy's novels, so White parodies the traditional ending where the future histories of the boy's companions are briefly related. He kills off several of the characters in grisly ways, and reveals Mr. Scott's torrid homosexual affair with his priest. Both White as novelist and his fictional champion commit acts of aggression, vaguely directed at "society" or "morality" or just "men." The usual antithesis is wrong: the opposite of love is not hate; it is power. But then usual and conventional beliefs don't hold in this book. White's novel only serves to perpetuate and legitimize the tragic condition of homosexuality.

John Updike's books come forth much like Solomon's children: we admire the fecundity of the masters, but are dubious about the attention their offspring receive. *Bech is Back* consists of a loosely connected group of stories continuing the adventures of the Jewish novelist Henry Bech that began in *Bech: A Book*. Bech provides Updike with a wry, ironic consciousness through which he can engage in humor and satire. Poor Bech is whisked all over the globe by his creator in this comic grab bag: the religious tourist attractions of Israel, the cultural pretensions of Third-World nations, the vulgarity of Canada and Australia, the inanity of upper-middle-class suburbia, all these come under the scrutiny—for what it's worth—of Henry Bech.

Insofar as there is a common theme running through *Bech is Back*, it is the role of the novelist in contemporary America. It is a question which Updike must have put to himself in private, and one on which he expends some levity in this public display. For some time Bech has produced no fiction (winning him the Melville Medal for the American author who has maintained the most meaningful silence); no substantive reason for his quietism is provided. In the longest chapter, "Bech Wed," the Jewish intellectual New Yorker's frustrations with the distractions and trivialities of Gentile suburbia are displayed. The result of Bech's marriage to Bea Latchett is his writing of *Think Big*, one of those fat paperbacks New Yorkers read in subways and Chock Full O'Nuts restaurants: sex, money, intrigue, and more sex for a thousand time-passing pages. On one level *Think Big* is Bech's reaction to the vulgar world of his wife, but Updike shows Bech at work on the novel *before* his marriage. Updike never takes the effort to explain *why* Bech writes the novel and from what causes it springs. There is a clue, though: Bech plans to follow *Think Big* with *Easy Money*.

What holds *Bech is Back* together is solely the surface tension maintained by Updike's mastery of style and comic sense. Beneath its surface the book is hollow, a plasterboard wall concealing only structural studs that are unevenly placed. It may be unfair to ask for more from a light satire, but to a culture in dissolution, as ours is, light satire can act not just as comic relief but as a general anaesthetic. We are certainly justified in asking for a little intellectual substance below the satire.

Stanley Elkin's *George Mills* is one of those frustratingly good novels whose parts are superior to the whole. Elkin is a powerful contemporary practitioner of the novel. His originality derives not from trendy tinkerings with narrative form, but from a compelling personal style and the timeless virtues of being able to tell a story, draw living characters, and create the illusion of life itself. Elkin's prose is reminiscent of Wyndham Lewis's: syntax can become a vehicle of meaning in the texts of both. Elkin is far from being a realist in the traditional sense of the word; his characters often speak a heightened diction which is dramatically appropriate, lifting the story onto a symbolic plane. It is refreshing to discover a true craftsman at a time when there is so much artiness and so little art.

George Mills is a hefty object, Victorian in size (500 pages) and in the use of a single character's name as title, which presages the examination of that life. However, George Mills is a composite figure: the title represents a male line of Millses stretching from the Middle Ages, all of whom possess the same "blue-collar" mentality. Elkin's use of this metahistorical character is daring, but ultimately fruitless. It is meant to symbolize the blue-collar frame of mind that justifies its own subservience to the rulers of society, and the Millses do develop a philosophy to protect themselves from having to act and take their destiny into their own hands. The central formulation of this idea comes in this comment on one of the Millses:

> He still believed in his fate, you see, still saw himself in the myth victim's delicious position, squeezed dry of force to change his life, with his eye on all the eleventh hour opportunities that could change it for him. Almost, as it were, on fate's side, confident he'd broken the code, taking the position that destiny had its fine print, oracle its *double entendre*, that whatever happens to people is a trick—God's fast one.

In the last George Mills, the main character of the novel, this attitude is what he considers to be his "state of grace." The trouble with all this is that legitimate description of a single character

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becomes forced and unreal when it has to symbolize an abstraction called "blue-collar blood." Elkin has presumably felt a need to illustrate some aspect of "class" in society, as if he could touch on some truth about the way the world works. The composite George Mills is a fascinating character, but he reveals little about the wealth of nations.

"[*George Mills* is] no less than Faulknerian."

—*The New Republic*

The remarkable thing about *George Mills* is that parts of it do possess power and reality: sections on the original, medieval George (known as Greatest Grandfather) and on the 19th-century version are funny tales told vibrantly and whose morals are subtle and restrained. Moreover, trenchant observations emerge with a frequency that makes it depressing that the unity of the novel is impaired by the imposition of liberal dogma. Compared to the slight achievements of White and Updike, Elkin's novel towers, but such is the cultural crisis that the imaginations of artists are stunted and diverted into triviality. □

The Word & the Image

James Phelan: *Scandals, Scamps, and Scoundrels;* Random House; New York.

Sidney Zion: *Read All About It!;* Summit Books; New York.

Jerry M. Rosenberg: *Inside The Wall Street Journal;* Macmillan; New York.

Av Westin: *Newswatch;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

by Edward J. Lynch

While celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Newsweek,* George Will acknowledged the close relationship between journalism and our democratic form of government, asserting: "This nation's premise is that history is made . . . by individuals' choices. However, since 1933 the choices have been becoming complicated faster than journalism has been becoming capable of clarifying complexities. Because history here is the history of the minds of free persons, the quality of the history we shall make in the next fifty years depends to an unprecedented, and perhaps dismaying extent, on the quality of journalism." These four volumes provide little evidence of clarity in either thought or language, while nurturing the dismay of anyone who would entrust the future of the republic to the denizens of the fourth estate.

All thinking, hence all communication, rests on metaphysical assumptions that ordinarily remain unexamined. Few people could engage in productive activity if their basic beliefs required review every morning. These tomes provide excellent examples of the so-called "thought processes," the mental habits that have supplanted thinking, and in these instances shape the nation's news. More than just selections of good writing, these authors provide some insight into how stories are selected, enabling readers to comprehend some of the factors that shape the definition of news. None of the books includes any critical commentary on the habits of the journalistic world; the authors themselves are self-satisfied members of this uncommonly smug community. Each is convinced that his corner on the truth is everything that could be gained by deadline; he thereby absolves himself of the responsibility for developing a serious understanding of the relationship between the stories written and the world that they both reflect and shape. So readers must ferret out an answer to the question: "How do journalists decide what is worthy of public consideration?"

James Phelan offers the least objectionable answer advanced by these authors. Phelan makes no pretense of having a serious view of the world. In his youth he worked as a caddy and was appalled that one of the country-club bankers could put on a smooth appearance even as marshals hauled him off for tax fraud. Incensed at the deception and envious of the banker's money, Phelan set out to uncover similar misrepresentations wherever he could find them. Throughout his pursuits, however, Phelan's juvenile animating impulse retained its monetary dimension. Each of his major stories includes an account of which editors were willing to cough up what fees and provide the most support for his investigation and writing. Herman Ridder comes off very favorably in Phelan's ledger: he was frequently willing to finance Phelan's recurrent probings into the power and money of Howard Hughes. The Hughes articles had the double benefit of nurturing Phelan's envy of those who have more money than he does while sustaining the financial reservoir that enabled him to devote some of his time to other subjects.

Sidney Zion magnifies Phelan's envy of those who have money; he omits any trace of the candor and humility evident in Phelan's writing. Sid Zion flaunts his arrogant ego outrageously by means of a vocabulary whose tendentiousness is exceeded only by its vulgarity. He misses the irony in his wangling from two editors expense money to "cover" an event that he wanted to attend anyway, using the money to indulge in the bars near the event, then writing a story assessing the ethics of those he only tangentially observed. Phelan's sense of his own limi-

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tations makes a useful comparison in this respect: When he sets out to prove a fraud or conspiracy, as in his shredding of Jim Garrison's indictments of Clay Shaw for a "conspiracy" to assassinate President John Kennedy that existed only in Garrison's imagination, Phelan puts individual items of evidence together and defines the missing pieces with precision. Zion is replete with grand assertions of conspiracy, from President Nixon to "the bosses" who run the Democratic Party to record-company executives. One almost wonders if he could write an article without reference to some ambiguous "they" who allegedly control the American way of life. Zion writes with precision about Israel (where he carefully traces the development of issues in terms of real decisions made by real people) and about the New York Yankees under George Steinbrenner (where he remembers that the purpose of professional sports is to win games). He specializes, however, in the coverage of both legal and domestic political issues. Although he is a lawyer, his familiarity with American constitutional jurisprudence extends only from William O. Douglas to Earl Warren, making his legal analyses rather anachronistic. Not only do his own commentaries surround the pieces reprinted in *Read All About It!,* he also has included reports of the reactions of his fellow journalists, who apparently spend their waking hours floating between their favorite watering holes and their newsrooms.

"Freedom of the press is . . . what *Read All About It!* is about."

—The Nation

"Read All About It! . . . . is a sexy read, and absolutely essential . . . . Sidney! . . . . What a book!"

—Village Voice

Jerry Rosenberg is an economist-historian who has surveyed the development of the *Wall Street Journal* through its first century. He reports just enough of the trendy criticisms of the paper to negate any charge that he has written an uncritical history. In one sense, this is fitting. A comparison with some of the competing luminaries in the journalistic establishment provides a perspective on how relatively excellent the *Wall Street Journal* is. Messrs. Dow and Jones and their heirs have defined the essence of sound business journalism over the past century. If a reader wants a thorough chronology of Dow-Jones, Inc., complete with names, dates, and conditions of service, through depression and prosperity, Mr. Rosenberg's volume serves well. His chronicle demonstrates that the perspective of the paper is limited, more limited than the avowed editorial concern with just the economic aspects of issues. Rosenberg joins these editors in apparent ignorance of any perception that there might be some purpose in life that transcends economics.

These volumes reflect the flaws of print journalism, a format for political discussion that is older than the American republic. Despite all of the abuses that can be attributed to newspaper and magazine writers, their words are set in type and, once published, provide a fixed format for deliberation: they remain for future consideration, questioning, and evaluation. These civilizing virtues of printed news can only remotely be associated with television. The absence of these traits causes a shudder when one is confronted with the assertion that two-thirds of the American people consider television their primary source of information.

Av Westin, Executive Producer of ABC News, concedes some flaws in televised news coverage, but his concessions never go beyond the mechanical. He believes that television does as good a job of presenting the news as possible, given the constraints of time, technology, and the deficiencies he attributes to the audience. A television news producer, after all, must provide "just enough detail to satisfy an attention span that is being interrupted by clattering dishes, dinner conversation or the fatigue of the end of the working day." Westin is bold enough to recount the criteria that guide his selection of stories for these inattentive viewers. Stories gain priority according to the questions that they address from the following hierarchy:

* Is my world safe?
* Are my city and home safe?
* If my wife, children, and loved ones are safe, then what has happened in the past 24 hours to shock them, amuse them, or make them better off than they were?

Westin has been involved in television news programs since the late 1940's. After more than 30 years in the business, he is thoroughly familiar with every trivial technical development in broadcasting, but he reveals no cognizance of the philosophic ancestor who wrote his guiding questions. But let us not indulge in an academic quarrel with one who believes that all essential information can be contained in 30-second tidbits arranged in a 30-minute program. What Mr. Westin's book really demonstrates is the segmented thinking that exemplifies television news. Just as the story at 7:10 may have no relationship to the one broadcast at 7:23, the material presented in one chapter of *Newswatch* is only coincidentally related to the argument asserted in another. The reader can be amused by the logistical difficulties of transporting the Mormon Tabernacle Choir from Salt Lake City to Mount Rushmore to sing as stampeding buffalo are herded by helicopter across South Dakota to herald the arrival of global communications satellites. The reader cannot be expected to forget this contrived spectacle, however, when the author admonishes his reporters to film

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"real" events rather than artifacts prompted by the presence of the camera. The aroma of the buffalo was not transmitted over the satellites, but the scent of shoddy thinking pervades the book. One wishes that such segmented thinking were only the accident of one producer's memoirs. Westin, however, is rated as one of the best in the business by his peers, and I have yet to encounter a serious rebuttal to assertions that this type of thought process, ignorant of its own intellectual ancestry, is endemic to modern broadcast journalism.

If these were the only defects of modern journalism, one might be tempted to believe that they can be surmounted, that journalism could develop a capacity to clarify the complexities of modern life. One cannot be sanguine, however, when the thinking reflected in these books rests its hopes for the journalism of the future on an intensified technology that will enable swifter circulation of greater amounts of information.

The founders of the American republic considered it more important that their citizens reach sound judgments than that they receive instant information. The purpose of representative and Federal institutions in a large republic is to guard *against* the swift kindling of public passions. The Federal dimension of American politics encourages people to assess the local and particular dimensions of these popular passions. Representative institutions should refine and enlarge these sentiments, so that the populace will be governed by the cool and deliberate sense of the community rather than the fleeting flame of public passion. Print journalism provides ample opportunity for the cultivation of identifiably separate local, regional, and national perspectives. It facilitates the extended public discussion that our representative institutions assume. Whatever the deficiencies of individual publications, it is still evident that written communication demands more discipline than televised ephemera. Television, in sharp distinction, operates most conveniently over monolithic national networks that seek to cultivate national passions. Its fleeting images discourage systematic thought. What was on the screen when the dishes clattered is no longer available for discussion after the dishes have been put away.

In his praise of the *Wall Street Journal,* Jerry Rosenberg indicates that Dow-Jones, too, is captivated by the lure of the "opportunities" afforded by modern communications technology. High-speed communications, satellite transmission, and international publications networks

are possibilities for contemporary print media as well as broadcast journalism. Such acceleration notwithstanding, the fact that Dow-Jones produces a product in print means that its messages aren't as ephemeral as those provided on television. In addition, the fact that it, unlike television, addresses a specific audience means that that audience can be aware of the limited range of subjects addressed by the *Wall Street Journal.* Av Westin is ignorant of his debt to Thomas Hobbes; Dow-Jones pays frequent homage to the economic legacy of Adam Smith, even as it divorces itself from the moral framework that enabled Smith to see the potential for people to live good lives through his system of natural liberty.

These books, then, reflect the alternatives facing Americans as we seek to secure our natural rights in a representative republic into the next century. To the extent that the mores of print journalism govern our public discussion, we may have reason to hope. To the extent that television intrudes further into the intellectual and public discussion, our hopes can only be as firm as the flickering images that pass over the evening news. □

The Use of American Whipping Boys

Milton Lomask: *Aaron Burr: The Conspiracy and Years of Exile 1805-1836;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

***Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant;* Edited by E. B. Long; Da Capo Press; New York.**

by Otto J. Scott

Milton Lomask's second, concluding volume of his biography of Aaron Burr fulfills the promise of his first. It is lucid, calm, penetrating, and succinct. The figure of Burr, long ago placed in the niche of all-American villains, emerges as a far more sympathetic personage than many of his enemies and critics. Burr was a Founding Father. Although not a delegate to the Founding Convention in Philadelphia, he was a colonel at the conclusion of the War of Independence from Britain (Burr served both Washington and Gates during the war), and therefore a Founding Father in the sense of being a parent at the birth of this Republic.

In the first volume of his biography *(Aaron Burr: The Years from Princeton to Vice President 1756-1805),* Lomask

Mr. Scott is a frequent contributor to these pages.

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brilliantly traced how the grandson of famed preacher Jonathan Edwards and the son of the second president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) was orphaned early, excelled in his studies, became a precocious officer in the War of Independence, made a successful marriage, became a successful lawyer, successfully competed against Alexander Hamilton, and soared politically to become Vice President of the United States. In attaining this high post within a decade after his initial entry into electoral politics, Burr frightened Thomas Jefferson probably more seriously than any other individual in the land, by attaining as many initial votes in the balloting for President as did the red-haired Virginian. Jefferson was certain that Burr planned this struggle and never forgave the short (5′6″) Northerner for coming so close to destroying all of his plans.

"The fact remains that, of 'virtue' . . . Burr possessed scarcely an ounce."
—*New York Times Book Review*

Alexander Hamilton, who, typically, worked with and against Burr, reached similar conclusions from a different perspective. It was Hamilton's machinations against President John Adams that, according to Lomask, effectively tore apart the Federalist Party. But Hamilton felt that it was Burr who was the marplot. After Adams was defeated for a second term, Burr became the object of Hamilton's vicious slanders. Hamilton's temper was nearly ungovernable. Burr, by contrast, was an easygoing man, not a grudge-bearer, usually calm under criticism. When Hamilton went too far, and when his description of Burr as "contemptible" reached the press, Burr issued his challenge—after several requests for a retraction were turned aside.

Both men, like many of that day, were experienced in duels. Legally forbidden, duels were socially sanctioned. Burr had fought a previous duel and emerged unscathed. Hamilton had served as a second and had lost a son in a duel. Before they met, both men drew up their wills. Hamilton and Burr fired nearly simultaneously: Hamilton's shot went wild; Burr's went home. Hamilton was mortally wounded. Later it was discovered that Hamilton had written, in his papers, that he would withhold his fire. Told about this, Burr shrugged. "Contemptible disclosure, if true," he said. He regarded it, in other words, as an insurance-policy insult, designed to wound retroactively, if Hamilton lost the decision. If so, it brilliantly succeeded. His death elevated Hamilton to the ranks of martyrs—and ruined Burr as thoroughly as if he had committed a sacrilege against a demigod.

Lomask's first volume ended not long after that tremendous climax. The second volume is mostly devoted to the details of the notorious Burr "conspiracy," his trial for treason, and his long decline from the top levels of American society. As such, it is a tremendous human document very coolly—and therefore effectively—told. Lomask's task is a difficult one; he is to be congratulated for his restraint and taste. The facts of Burr's life are, of course, inextricably entwined with those of Hamilton's and Jefferson's. There was something about Burr that brought out the worst in both of these eminent contemporaries—and in many others.

Burr himself could never quite explain this. At least on the surface he was a man of great social gifts, pleasant in conversation, witty, well-dressed, and good-natured. He was not profound, according to Lomask; he was not a man prone to turn his ideas into abstract principles. Above all, he never preached. It was Burr's misfortune to live past the period when his aristocratic attitudes were the reigning fashion and into the turbulent democracy of an America growing steadily more plebeian, more money-conscious, less educated, and infinitely less tolerant. His "conspiracy," according to Lomask, was aimed largely at Spanish possessions. These had also attracted Andrew Jackson and others, who sided with Burr. Even Jefferson was temporarily sympathetic. But when General Wilkinson, an agent of Imperial Spain, succeeded in drawing Burr into this venture for the purpose of betraying him, it was Jefferson who sought to have Burr hanged for treason.

Burr was not convicted in the court because there was no suitable evidence. But the trial was a difficult one. Chief Justice John Marshall (whom Jefferson also hated) effectively prevented Burr from being railroaded, and in the process narrowed the American definition of treason to specific acts.

Lomask makes it clear that Burr's trial effectively ruined Burr's attempts to recover from the duel with Hamilton and his defeat in politics. Mobs rose against him; he became a target of the press, much as Nixon was later. Burr had to flee the country. (If Nixon was not an ex-President, there seems little doubt he would have had to do the same.) In England, Sweden, Germany, and France Burr was received in top circles, but his circumstances were penurious and all the governments gave him a great deal of trouble. In Europe for four years he was persistently hounded by the Spanish foreign ministry and the American State Department. After these difficulties, he returned to New York to resume the practice of law. He was getting on his feet when his grandson died and his daughter Theodosia was lost at sea. They had been the center of the widowed Burr's emotional life; he spent the rest of his years still dapper, still cheerful, still surrounded by women and even natural children, but in a state of emotional detachment.

Through all these long years Burr was hounded by creditors but somehow managed to escape imprisonment. At 77 he married a woman 58 years old named Eliza Bowen Jumel, a widow and the richest woman in the United States. She divorced him a year later for squander-

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ing some of her money (Burr was never able to handle money), and the final decree of that divorce—on grounds of adultery—arrived on September 14th, 1836, the day of Burr's death.

That Burr's real life was never put on the stage or written in a proper novel remains one of the many disappointments of American theater and letters. The stereotypes that continue to befuddle our history have long projected Burr as a super-Machiavellian demon, while the truth—far more interesting, poignant, and revealing—has almost entirely waited for Milton Lomask to tell. His triumph is that he has told it without the usual exasperating academic "perhapses" and "as ifs," but with convincing detail.

Ulysses S. Grant was born in Ohio in 1822 when Aaron Burr was 66 years old. Grant's family was relatively old, having landed in New England in 1630. But misfortune had reduced the circumstances of Grant's grandfather, and his father had to struggle to become a fairly successful merchant. The boy was raised in Ohio in a semirural environment. His father didn't consider him intelligent, for the young Grant had a weak sense of money—and no failing is regarded with more contempt by a merchant. He was sent to West Point because there was an opening, because his father had connections—and because there seemed no other course. To his own surprise Grant easily passed the entrance examinations and managed his four years respectably, thanks primarily to a natural aptitude for mathematics.

In his autobiography, which was written in 1885 and finished when he knew he was dying, Grant is direct, clear, and candid. He didn't like the army or military life. He spent 15 years as an officer at a time when promotion was slow, and finally left when he could still do so honorably, because of a drinking problem. His autobiography does not mention this. However, Grant is also modest about his accomplishments, so that lapse can be forgiven. In any event, his drinking did not become disruptive until Grant was stationed in San Francisco in the Gold Rush days. In other words, in peacetime, on modest pay, separated from his wife and children, surrounded by vice and scramblers for money at a time when California was overburdened with men and short of women.

Before then, Grant had, as a young officer, gone through the entire sweep of the Mexican War. "I had gone into battle of Palo Alto in May, 1846, a second lieutenant and entered the city of Mexico sixteen months later with the same rank . . . . My regiment lost four commissioned officers, all senior to me, by steamboat explosions during the Mexican War. The Mexicans were not so discriminating. They sometimes picked off my juniors." Grim humor appears frequently in Grant's memoirs, and is all the more remarkable because it is so seldom that humor is associated with Grant. Yet he had humor.

Only those who have experienced a war can appreciate how rare it is that a participant is able to describe what happened beyond his own experience. The instinct of self-survival rises high in times of peril and is apt to diminish one's powers of observation regarding others. That was not so with Grant. He did not say that he enjoyed the war in Mexico; in fact he railed against it, and called it "unjust." He believed the United States played the role of bully, and he blamed Southern slave-owners for scheming to enlarge slavery's territories. That was a charge made by the New England radicals in 1846, and Grant believed it. But unlike the radicals of the 1960's, Grant's objections to the Mexican War did not lead him to desert his duty: he fought, though he did not agree. His descriptions of the actions he saw are classic. His admiration for Winfield Scott is evident. He reminds us that Scott's name has been somewhat unjustly dimmed by later and larger conflicts—though in none of these did the United States gain as much as it gained in the 1840's.

By the time the War Between the States drew near, Grant was working for his father as a clerk in the family store in Galena, Illinois. He had resigned from the Army and failed at both farming and the real-estate business. His steps downward were difficult; he describes them bluntly. Mobilization enabled him to work briefly in the office of the Governor of Illinois. Then he entered the war as a Colonel of Volunteers at the head of an Illinois regiment. From that point onward the figure of a military leader of remarkable ability emerges.

At his first confrontation, Grant says, "my heart was in my mouth." But when he reached the battleground, he discovered that the enemy had fled. That made Grant realize that the opposing colonel had also been frightened. After that realization, he was never again afraid during his struggles. In the end, wearing the shirt of a private soldier with the straps of a lieutenant general (a rank previously held only by George Washington), the short Grant met the tall, imposing Gen-

In the Mail-

Generations of the Faithful Heart: On the Literature of the South **by M. E. Bradford; Sherwood Sugden; LaSalle, IL.** The "Southern Renaissance" is lovingly examined. If not quite fugitives, Northern readers may feel like outsiders.

Christianity and the Intellectuals **by Arthur Trace: Sherwood Sugden; LaSalle, IL.** We are not as convinced as Dr. Trace is that "Most major intellectuals are still hostile toward revealed religion where they are not indifferent to it." *Most* is a big word.

Reflections on a Century of United States-Korean Relations **from the Academy of Korean Studies and The Wilson Center; University Press of America; Washington, DC.** Korean-American relations are not—Nielsen ratings notwithstanding—activities defined by Alan Alda.

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eral Robert E. Lee, who wore a spotless, gray, gold-braided Confederate uniform. Grant did not look like a victor, but life is seldom as appropriate as the theater in its figures of destiny.

The man who emerges from the words of Grant's memoirs is far more impressive than his later reputation. The world in which he lived is far removed from ours. His was a world where farm boys were more numerous than others, where both he and Lincoln used the frontier saying, "If you can't skin you have to hold a leg while others who can, do the skinning." Lincoln and Grant understood one another; they both knew the grim reality of a fight and they were both often surrounded by men who considered them socially inferior.

When the intellectually arrogant Henry Adams met Grant in the White House, he said that of the dozen Presidents he met, "Grant was the most curious object of study among them all." He compared Grant only to Garibaldi: "in both, the intellect counted for nothing, only the energy counted. The type was pre-industrial, archaic, and would have seemed so even to a cave-man. Adam, according to legend, was such a man." Adams felt that Grant "should have been extinct," and he waxed sarcastic about Grant's existence, saying that it "upset evolution." What Adams resented was the sense of inferiority he felt when confronted by Grant, whom he regarded as a specimen of "men whose energies were the greater, the less they wasted on thought; men who sprang from the soil to power; apt to be distrustful of themselves and of others; shy; jealous; sometimes vindictive; more or less dull in outward appearance; always needing stimulants, but for whom action was the highest stimulant—the instinct of fight. Such men were forces of nature, energies of the prime, like the *Pteraspis*, but they made short work of scholars. They had commanded thousands of these and saw no more in them than in others. The fact was certain; it crushed argument and intellect at once."

This resentment, expressed in our own time by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. about the military leaders he heard discussing the invasion of Castro's Cuba, is a commonplace among those who pride themselves on their "intellect" and deny that other men think. Grant was able—in the midst of battle—to issue orders that were masterpieces of clarity and logic, spirit, and creativity. Compared to the complex forces with which Grant had to deal, which involved weather, terrain, the reactions of thousands, and the opposition of more thousands, conducting a symphony orchestra or writing a book is simplicity itself. Adams could not appreciate that, but neither could many other spectators of life.

General Grant suffered from disgraces inflicted by false friends and relatives during his two administrations as President of the United States. Since Grant's time, this country has discovered that we can have even worse administrators, ranging from the corrupt Lyndon Johnson to the weirdly unworldly Woodrow Wilson and the inept Jimmy Carter. The Presidency, to each of these men, was the apex of their careers; for Grant it was an honorarium for services rendered. The figures of both Burr and Grant have been restored to a more proper placement by two eminent biographers: Lomask for Burr and William S. McFeely for Grant. (McFeely's book is responsible for this reissuance of Grant's *Memoirs.*) It would be ungracious to say that the wait has been too long; it is fitting to say that one can be grateful that it is now rewarded. □

The Grin Beneath the Skin

William Golding: *A Moving Target;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

Alan Sillitoe: *Her Victory;* Franklin Watts; New York.

by E. Christian Kopff

The argument could be made that Alfred Hitchcock's greatest movie is *Shadow of a Doubt.* In it he shows a bright small-town American girl growing up bored and frustrated with the cheerful routines of daily life, patterns broken only by her father's playful competition with the next-door neighbor in planning the perfect murder. Then Uncle Charlie comes to visit, full of charm and the aroma of distant places. Uncle Charlie, however, turns out to be a psychopathic murderer, and the young lady sees how easy is the descent into an Avernus of horror and crime, how dearly purchased and hardly preserved our conventions and routines are. The father and the next-door neighbor represent a tradition in our culture that goes back to Sophocles, a tradition of living normally while imagining the ultimate horrors. Sophocles' greatest plays, *Oedipus* and *Antigone,* portray a world turned upside down, gods remorseless and fate inevitable even for the good, especially for the good. His own life was quite the reverse. He was elected to a number of high offices and on one occasion helped to overthrow the democracy—not an unusual act in his time. After death, the playwright himself was worshiped as a hero. "He was a cheerful soul in this life and cheerful in the other world," thought Aristophanes.

One thinks of the father in *Shadow of*

"I feel no rush of grace or vision as Mr. Golding passes by."
—*New York Times Book Review*

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a Doubt and Sophocles when reading *A Moving Target,* a volume of William Golding's articles and talks from the 1960's and 1970's. His most famous novel, *Lord of the Flies,* was read by probably every college student in the 1950's and remains a powerful book, one that struck with violence and insight at the heart of liberalism's pet notions: the natural goodness of children, the inevitability of democracy, the security of individual rights. Golding examined one of our time's most popular prayers: "If only children could be separated from the society that teaches them wrongful things . . ." He showed that if such a petition were granted, the result would be worse than what we have now, that civilization and its discontents are all that restrain not the beast, but that twisted skein of instinct and intellect that is man. Golding continued in this iconoclastic mode. In other books he took on other modern myths, the myth of progress in *The Inheritors* for instance, and made us see them through other eyes. He hit a dry spell in the 1960's, but he has started to publish novels again and the reviewers have given their benediction.

What madness or near madness, what horror lies behind Golding's pitiless gaze into the heart of human darkness? It is difficult to answer from the evidence in this collection. In it, the portrait of Golding is the one that follows. He is a happily married provincial Englishman who prefers his local cathedral to the fancier one in the next diocese. The boat trips he takes aren't to desert islands but pleasant passages through the domestic canals of Holland with his family. Golding calmly tells gatherings of French *Anglicistes* banal but well-phrased truths about inspiration, hard work, and belief in God. He becomes risqué when he defends literal translations of Homer against artsy modern ones. Golding displays a happy satisfaction and calm wonder at the joys of the local and the rooted. The collection of essays is not unlike a modern version of George Gissing's novel *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft.* Perhaps it gives us a glimpse of the father in *Shadow of a Doubt,* who lives a life rooted in the local and the normal, in which imagination drains the horror and the madness from an abscess that never quite heals. Or is it the reverse? Do the normal and rooted give us the knowledge of their alternative, the savagery that will come if we do not maintain our hard-won normal lives?

In the 1950's Alan Sillitoe's first novels and stories emerged: *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner. Her Victory* is his 12th novel. There are superficial differences. The young runner in *Loneliness* found in his running a time and a place to be alone from school and society. At the end, when victory is in his grasp, he stops and refuses to win, lest he share his victory with school and master. True victory is a private possession. Pam, the title figure in *Her Victory* tells us at the end of that novel, "There is no such thing as victory, if you have no one to share it with." This isn't exactly a sentiment born of nobility. Pam is a portrait of psychotic selfishness. She twice tries to kill her husband and once her lover. She twice attempts suicide, once while pregnant. She moves randomly back and forth from adultery to homosexuality. Most of this is presented from her point of view, very sympathetically. Intelligent and sensitive characters, male and female, fall in love with her; she destroys or betrays every relationship, deserting husband, child, and lovers. Had I been a member of the jury that tried Meursault, Camus's Stranger, I would have voted for his execution. But if I were running a fictional dating service, I would immediately match up Pam with Meursault, not with the lonely sailor and the desperate bisexual mother of two whom she ends up attracting and tormenting in *Her Victory.*

"[*Her Victory* is] more interesting and affecting than anything else [Sillitoe] has published in years."

—*New York Times Book Review*

Part of my problem can be seen in the picture of Pam's husband, "a brute of a man," we are told on the dust jacket. To me he seems a hardworking businessman who raised himself from a family of shiftless Andy Capps to owning his own small business, paying his workers—who respect him—better-than-average wages, even possessing a fair, if rough, sense of humor. Pam, his wife of 20 years, is always ranting about killing herself. He comes downstairs the morning after a fight and finds her standing in the freezer, which she has emptied to clean. "Remember how long we shopped around for such a good quality freezer?" he says. "I'll never be able to use it again if you do yourself in in it." Pam responds by trying to stab him to death and then running away. By the middle of the novel, her humiliation of him has driven him back to comradeship with his loutish brothers and basically back to their level. It is the effect she has on everyone.

The main love affair of the book is comic. Her lover is a sailor who grew up

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in an orphanage. He discovers at age 50 and under Pam's influence that he was the son of a promiscuous and self-destructive middle-class English girl and an itinerant Jewish sea cook. Since his grandmother was a Jewish convert to Christianity who reverted to Judaism after the death of her son in World War I, he figures that he is Jewish. So he eventually leaves Pam and their illegitimate daughter to move to Israel. Pam ultimately decides to leave her bisexual girl friend and follow her lover.

The sickest part of this weird extravaganza is the rearing of children. We learn about the mother of the sailor, who drove her own mother to suicide by her crazy promiscuity, then moved in with Dad for a while to torture him, and finally killed herself. The sailor, as mentioned, deserts his illegitimate daughter. The bisexual at least stays with her kids, but she brings them up in an atmosphere of homosexual promiscuity and open cheating on the British welfare state. The children in *Lord of the Flies* had better supervision.

Eternal vigilance is the price of sanity and normalcy. This sanity is capable of producing cathartic visions of human pride and weakness and tragedy, an *Oedipus*, a *Lord of the Flies*. When we cease to strive for the normal and the sane, however, we achieve neither freedom nor self-fulfillment. Our visions are no longer moving tragedies but degrading farces without meaning, without insight, without beauty. Sophocles' and William Golding's lives of probity and sanity preserve the possibility of the normal and the tragic in their worst imaginings of destruction and horror, like the father in *Shadow of a Doubt*. Uncle Charlie and Alan Sillitoe's Pam try to make immorality seem charming and almost normal, a spurious victory over marriage and hometown and normal life. Behind the smiling mask is a horror that is worse than any endured by Oedipus or the children in *Lord of the Flies* because it degrades, it denatures. Any skill that disguises or defends such degradation is not art; it is blasphemy. □

No Shades of Gray

Roy Wilkins with Tom Mathews: *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins;* Viking Press; New York.

Roger Wilkins: *A Man's Life: An Autobiography;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

by Keith Bower

The following story is the typical fare of television's *60 Minutes*. In the Algiers section of New Orleans, two black men were separately shot by police in the middle of the night. They had been suspected of being involved in the death of a New Orleans police officer. Two fellow blacks swore affidavits that the suspects had initiated fire on the investigating officers. Later, both witnesses said their testimony had been extracted by force. A black rookie officer corroborated their retractions, saying that he had remained silent and gone along with the third-degree tactics in order to win the approval of his colleagues. The program went on to imply that when a cop is killed some black will end up paying for it with blood. Now, either there was a brutal transgression of the Fifth Amendment in Louisiana, or there's a whole lot of jivin' goin' on. Either way, the case says something about racism in contemporary America. How far have we come when police can perpetrate racist violence in front of a black officer with an assumption that he won't say anything?

In Roy Wilkins's autobiography there is ample recounting of such injustices; they are real, documented cases. One of them, the hangings of three circus roustabouts by a mob in Duluth, Minnesota, hits close to home. I'm from Minnesota, yet I don't know about racism: I can't imagine men swinging from lamp posts 60-odd years ago. Recently in St. Louis I walked into a liquor store in what I later found out was one of those districts you don't go into late at night. The clerk (a woman) told me to get my "white ass" out quick after I'd been shortchanged two dollars and asked for an audit. I got off lightly, feeling as if I had somehow helped to rectify in part some ageless debt. My perspiration was probably like that of Roy Wilkins when he was detained by crackers near Dundee, Mississippi, or Roger Wilkins when rousted by police during the Detroit riots. In so many ways we are all alike.

Both of the Wilkinses have spent time in many of the places I have. The house Roy Wilkins grew up in (on Galtier in St. Paul) was idyllic compared to the "project" I once rented in the Selby-Dale slum. Roger lived for a time on Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. It is now an Indian ghetto. I lived there as a janitor, slept with my bicycle, and kept three deadbolts on the door. They grew up knowing that there were many things a black could never be, or so they were taught. Roger's father disabused him at a tender age of his notion of being a railroad engineer. Roy remembers that same incident in his autobiography. I never heard there was anything I couldn't be in America. But there is one thing I can't be, and I forget about it until I find myself in places like the St. Louis liquor store. I'll never be a brother.

Both of these men lived about as comfortably as a black can in America. Roy admits it; Roger bewails his fate. There is an embarrassed sense of having lucked out. Roy is from an older generation and prides himself on having made the right decisions and on making the most of his good upbringing. Roger is

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tormented by the ease with which he broke into the inner circle of the white elite—parties at Lillian Hellman's and at Leonard Bernstein's digs—and by the distance this put between him and his race. Roger Wilkins's life appears to have been one long ingratiating, integrated soiree, with him as the only integrator. He recounts this nightmare over and over: at the Gridiron Club watching Richard and Spiro play minstrel songs, at a Fourth of July fireworks display in northwest Washington with five thousand white faces, being chosen by the Ford Foundation to integrate the Harmony Club, New York's German Jewish stronghold. Grueling.

Roger's book is the more interesting, and depressing, of the two. Roy's autobiography is worthwhile, especially for anyone interested in how an organization like the N.A.A.C.P. (founded by whites) grew into a national power. As a condensed history of the civil-rights movement in America from 1920-1970 it is valuable. But it doesn't provide much about Roy Wilkins: he is a journalist and his book is straight journalism. Everything is seen in the light of the delicate politics of race; there are few redeeming white folks and scores of bigots. Incidents of unfairness and nastiness are compounded to illustrate the way things really were, from the Ossian Sweet Case to the Scottsboro Nine to the Packard Strike to the Algiers Motel. Thurgood Marshall, Walter White, and W.E.B. DuBois take on heroic proportions, and well they might.

It is odd how little of Martin Luther King appears in either book. That is perhaps because both Roy and Roger Wilkins wisely avoided the front lines. Roy saw Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown as the shades of Marcus Garvey come to Jim Crow the black movement back into separatism. He comments on the generation gap he noticed between himself and the activists, who refused his request that they observe a day of rest to let Luci Baines Johnson be wed in peace, saying:

> You have displayed more backbone in defending Luci than you have shown for the millions of black people being brutalized every day in the United States. You have displayed more backbone in defending Luci than you have shown for the colored people of Vietnam being napalmed by Luci's father.

That was the rhetoric of the 60's, and the soldiers of the so-called Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee did not appreciate the compliment being paid them by a wizened general who thought that they could understand the element of decorum and respect he recommended to them. Roy Wilkins knew what the communists wanted out of the black race, and he never forgave them for choosing his people as martyrs for the infernal dialectic. His life had a single purpose: to guarantee that all people be treated alike under the law. It was a noble purpose, and we can thank Roy Wilkins for helping to keep open the middle course between black and white extremism so that this necessary reconstruction could be accomplished.

Roger Wilkins's story is more interesting. Roger Wilkins's single concern, by his own admission, was Roger Wilkins. His book is an apology to his two children for the time he spent away from them building his career, first with the Agency for International Development, then with the Justice Department, then the Community Relations Service, the Ford Foundation, the *Washington Post,* the *New York Times,* and finally the *Washington Star*. His life is a conscientious attempt to do things on his own, to get to the point where people no longer call him Roy Wilkins, or mistake him for Julian Bond. He isn't there yet.

One tiresome aspect of the book, for which he has no apology, is his disastrous sex life. Phil Donahue blames his own divorce on the Roman Catholic Church's deluding him into taking his spouse for granted, as if separations had never occurred in that congregation before. Roger Wilkins blames America for teaching him to lust after white women but settle for a black wife. He does apologize for the mahogany walls in his Ford Foundation office, for the weekend jaunts to Jamaica and Martinique, where he is tortured in spirit and finds it necessary to "get into" his West Indian servants, gain their acceptance, before he can be happy. Taking a white mistress along doesn't help. Roger Wilkins's whole life is a case of "There but for the Grace of God"—only he doesn't believe in God. He does confess to being a Christian in his "marrow" and is obliged to his preacher-grandfather for his vestigal sense of fairness. But when the Jamaican bartender kindly adds his tab to some anonymous white man's bill, it is a triumph of acceptance; I don't think Roger Wilkins accepts the notion that such accounts are also audited by a higher authority.

Roger Wilkins's book is little more than a collection of compliments from important people and an account of his minor, very minor, victories for his race —first black assistant attorney general, first black editorial board member of the *Post,* first high-level black in the Ford Foundation. Every establishment he worked for contains enough racism for him to blow up about. The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* both felt his lash when he helped blacks sue for equal employment opportunities, even when it meant breaking the protocol on editorial people mixing in newsroom politics and turning on Katherine Graham and all those nice, forgiving, ermined associates.

This autobiography is interesting because Wilkins lets us in on himself; he even loathes himself, which may be in vogue now. He doesn't blame *everything*

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on America—he just fails to identify which bad things are his fault and which aren't. He decries the wrecking being done in Washington, but he doesn't indicate that there are plenty of people besides President Reagan who have disbelieved in the "Great Society." He doesn't deal intelligently with the Moynihan hypothesis, but merely attacks that blockbuster with an ad hominem about the Senator's behavior at a long-forgotten cocktail party. It's pretty early for Roger Wilkins to be writing about his life, unless his self-loathing is so genuine as to put temptations in his mind when he passes open windows.

Perhaps getting equality does mean getting even. But Roy Wilkins would not go for that. The nation has to keep the white reaction in check in order to go forward, and maybe, with delicacy, we can achieve that. These accounts of past infamies should not be dismissed. □

Embarrassment & Hysteria in History

Stuart Creighton Miller: *"Benevolent Assimilation": The American Conquest of the Philippines 1899-1903;* Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

Stanley I. Kutler: *The American Inquisition: Justice and Injustice in the Cold War;* Hill and Wang; New York.

by Alan J. Levine

It is not much of an exaggeration to say that since the mid-1960's the writing of American history has become largely an exercise in what used to be called muckraking. Volume after volume has poured forth recounting, often exaggerating, even occasionally inventing less palatable aspects of the American past. But, not *every* ugly episode in American history has been examined. For example, the sufferings inflicted on Loyalists during the Revolution don't draw much attention from American historians. While it is understandable that "reactionaries" are unimportant to the regnant ideologues, there are other surprising gaps in the savaging of American history. Amid all the complaints about alleged American imperialism, this country's one *real* exercise in imperialism, the annexation of the Philippines, is often ignored. Why? The reason is not difficult to explain: the imperialism of 1898 is not entirely compatible with the left's pet theory, i.e., William Appleman Williams's "Open-Door" thesis. According to Williams, Americans were not interested in territorial possessions but in economic empire to be attained by forcing "Open Door" policies of unrestricted trade and investment throughout the entire world. The fact that some Americans felt it necessary to acquire a small but unmistakable territorial empire does not fit the Williams thesis. The new left, even as they produced their analyses of American foreign relations from the late-19th century to the present, therefore showed only slight interest in the takeover of the Philippines, despite its seeming utility as "The First Vietnam." Thus, in the absence of rhetorical ideologues, what little has been written about the annexation of the Philippines is of fairly high quality. Despite some faults, Stuart Creighton Miller's *"Benevolent Assimilation"* continues this tradition of high standards. It is a detailed and well-written examination of an episode in American history that may cause some discomfiture and that is hard to explain. It is still difficult to account for the rapid spread of the notion that possession of the Philippines was somehow necessary to the United States.

In 1898 business leaders in general were uninterested in territorial annexation. The United States had little concrete interest in either the Pacific area or in keeping the Philippines. President McKinley was a "reluctant" imperialist. His ignorance of the situation there, which was not atypical, is evidenced in his remark that it was necessary "to educate the Filipinos and uplift and civilize and Christianize them": most Filipinos had been Christians for four centuries. Throughout the struggle to beat the Filipinos into submission, imperialists freely referred to the only Westernized people in the Far East as "barbarians" and "savages." Simultaneously, most Americans—and a majority of the military commanders on the scene—pretended that only a minority of the Filipinos were nationalists.

With the exception of General Arthur MacArthur (father of Douglas) the senior military officers of that war do not come off very well in Miller's book. General Frederick Funston, one of the few popular heroes of the war, was a rascal whose career might have been amusing at a safe distance—out of artillery range, that is. Although some of Miller's references to large-scale massacres are unsubstantiated, the war *was* a cruel one. Villages were burned, prisoners of war were shot, and torture was freely employed.

Genius was not in evidence in this war. Only the Filipinos' pathetic weapons kept American losses fairly low—an enemy whose chief weapon was the bolo cannot be considered a formidable foe. Miller argues, though he admits the evidence is not conclusive, that under MacArthur's predecessor, the U.S. Army was responsible for beginning the war, which civilian leaders in Washington did not want. Miller's animus toward the military occasionally gets out of hand. At one point, he even makes sanitation sound imperialistic: "since the natives did not share the antiseptic obsession of their conquerors, delousing was invariably carried out at gunpoint, as were other sanitary measures." His attempts to suggest that military brutality in this

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war was a continuation of the viciousness of the Indian-fighting army are also dubious; such views smack of the fashionable myths of the Indian wars rather than reality. "Virtually every member of the high command had spent most of his career terrorizing Apaches, Comanches, Kiowas, and the Sioux. Some had taken part in the massacre of Wounded Knee." (Unlike some Indians, the tribes mentioned were far from helpless innocents, and, as S.L.A. Marshall and Robert Utley have shown, Wounded Knee was not a massacre, though neither was it a credit to the Army.)

Curiously, Miller is a bit unfair in his handling of the opponents of the war, the anti-imperialists, although he is careful to defend them against the smears of Marxist critics. He suggests that they exhibited priggishness and intellectual arrogance and were out of touch with the times. The vigorous anti-imperialists, he shows, were mostly upper-class people a generation or more older than most of the imperialist leaders. Many were racists who disliked recent immigrants as well as nonwhites. Perhaps Miller is oversensitive. While some of the intellectual anti-imperialist leaders of the Eastern elite were mild racists, the anti-imperialist forces of the South and West were often rabid bigots whose prime objection to annexing the Filipinos was their skin color. Many anti-imperialists, notably Senator Hoar, were rock-ribbed conservatives, while many of their imperialist opponents, e.g., Senator Beveridge and Theodore Roosevelt, were Progressives. Racism and antiracism were found on both sides of the political spectrum, and if many imperialists believed racial stereotypes, they were often much milder racists than their opponents. Miller's avoidance of fashionable simplisms in discussing this subject is as praiseworthy as his skill in presenting a complex situation with clarity. If some of his analogies with Vietnam are less than successful, it should be said that Miller, too, recognizes their limitations.

Perhaps the strongest point that Miller makes is that of the enormous difference in mental attitudes between the turn of the century and today; the imperialism of 1900 was based to a large extent on inflated American egotism and succeeded by manipulating naive and unquestioning patriotism, while the so-called antiwar movement of the 1960's arose from and exploited the opposite qualities. Though Miller might not agree, both the imperialist and antiwar movements would seem to exemplify the danger of allowing intellectual fashion to dictate foreign policy.

McCarthyism is one embarrassing aspect of modern history that is discussed far more frequently than the Philippine Insurrection—though the actual evils involved were of less magnitude. Indeed, lamenting the supposed damage to civil liberties in that era has become a veritable industry. Stanley Kutler's *The American Inquisition* is a rather dismal contribution to this genre. While real, though on the whole rather minor, evils did occur in the late 40's and 50's, Kutler's book is marked by exaggeration and deviousness at strategic points. He often slides over the distinction between false accusations of espionage and communist affiliation and true ones. He can't get very excited about the latter; Alger Hiss remains only an "alleged" Soviet agent—despite the decision of a jury and Allen Weinstein's research. Kutler's discussion of real abuses is submerged in tripe and inaccuracy.

Two of the cases discussed—the trial of Iva Toguri ("Tokyo Rose") and the Ezra Pound case—have nothing to do with the Cold War. The prosecution of Toguri, a victim of circumstances who seems to have done nothing wrong, was an instance of petty revenge for supposed wartime betrayal. The use of psychiatry that enabled Ezra Pound to escape trial may well have been dishonest and deplorable, but it had little to do with an American "inquisition." The only function of the chapter on Pound seems to be to let Kutler vent his spleen against fascism and to display his double standard. Most people would find it a bit difficult to explain the difference between the actions of Ezra Pound, whom Kutler correctly excoriates, and those of John Wesley Powell, the pro-Chinese propagandist whom he defends.

Kutler's discussion is often vague and even downright evasive. He spends an entire chapter, for example, deploring the prosecution for contempt of the defense lawyers in the Smith Act case of 1949. He is harshly critical of Judge Medina's handling of the matter. But Kutler carefully avoids saying precisely what the lawyers did or were supposed to have done. The reader is just supposed to accept Kutler's claim that it was all a dreadful exercise in repression. Kutler's discussion of the before-mentioned John Wesley Powell case is even more tendentious. Powell, who ran an English-language newspaper in Shanghai, acted as a Chinese-communist propagandist during the Korean War, publicizing the communist charges that the Americans were waging germ warfare. The government made a fumbling attempt to try him for sedition after the war. Kutler manages to discuss the case without mentioning the fact that the "confessions" of American prisoners of war were extracted by torture; he thus implies that the United States *might* actually have been guilty of both aggression and the use of germ warfare in Korea.

In his epilogue, Kutler unblushingly presents today's favorite lie: that the late 40's and 50's saw "repression unprecedented in scale, intensity, and duration." Whatever one thinks of McCarthyism and some of the antics of the loyalty and security system in the early 50's, this is simply nonsense. U.S. history contains instances of worse violations of civil liberties than anything Kutler relates about the 50's. The 50's had their faults, but only self-pitying leftists can find an "inquisition" in that era. Since the realities of that time have never been satisfactory to Kutler and his ilk, they have to invent a largely fictitious version of it. There *have* been embarrassing moments in American history. But the 1950's wasn't one of them. □

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COMMENDABLES

Celestial Science & Terrestrial Troubles

Abraham Pais: ***Subtle is the Lord . . .: The Science and the Life of Albert Einstein;*** Oxford University Press; New York.

"It would surely be better if I did not live at all," wrote a disheartened young Albert Einstein, but in this unscientific pronouncement, as in many others, the wisdom of the 20th century's greatest physicist is questionable. Indeed, as the masterful portrait offered by Abraham Pais makes clear, it is very fortunate for the world of theoretical science that he did live, even if his private life was at times difficult. Because he himself is a physicist, Dr. Pais can understand and analyze Einstein's professional accomplishments far more completely than can most readers. In fact, those portions of his book devoted to Einstein's science will prove largely impenetrable to anyone not trained in calculus, non-Euclidean geometry, and quantum mechanics. Dr. Pais has, however, deliberately provided the layman "a nontechnical tour" through an interwoven "nonscientific biography of Einstein," and here the average reader may easily follow Pais's lucid exposition. No special expertise is required to appreciate the concise but revealing depiction of the sensitive, retiring, and sometimes eccentric man behind the legendary mask: the solitary adolescent who sang hymns to himself on the way to school; the absentminded groom who forgot the keys to his honeymoon quarters; the shattered husband and father who walked weeping from the train station after his wife and sons had left him; the sophisticated man of culture who relaxed with the poetry of Heine and the music of Mozart. Mercifully, derivational rigor goes no further than does Einstein's science: Pais does not try, as too many modern biographers do, to interpret the details of his subject's life, especially his repeated failures in marriage, within some pseudoscientific psychoanalytic framework. Einstein was, after all, his friend, and postmortem psychiatry easily becomes the cruelest of betrayals.

It does seem curious, though, that Dr. Pais has not identified the rather obvious philosophical relationship between two important strands of Einstein's nonscientific thought: his repudiation of Judeo-Christian religion and his frequently radical commitments to pacifism and leftist visions of utopia. As the title of Pais's book indicates, Einstein often employed the language of traditional religion, but for him it was void of transcendent content. Einstein perceived his search for cosmic harmony as "religious," yet his was a religion without the God of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob; without, Pais avers, any God at all, except perhaps the naturalized, pantheistic God of Spinoza. But when men crave perfect order, the clean and beautiful stasis of mathematics, while denying transcendence, they are inevitably baffled by the fallen world of imperfect men and institutions. Unable to find a solid, scientifically demonstrable link between the *is* and the *ought*, they are invariably confounded by what the Apostle Paul called "the mystery of iniquity," and consequently they end up, like Einstein, admiring cant-spouting villains like Lenin and issuing naive and shrill demands for universal disarmament. (Fortunately, Einstein temporarily mollified his pacifism during World War II.) Because his rare mind could fathom stellar forces, Einstein's physics is of incalculable value; because his skeptical soul beheld nothing in the heavens *but* stars, his politics is merely a dubious surrogate religion. (BC) □

IN FOCUS

Slipping & Sliding

John McPhee: ***In Suspect Terrain;*** Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Fred West

The 1960's produced more than a fair share of causes and theories, from the glandular reactions to the Vietnam War to transformational grammar. Included in this packet was the theory of plate tectonics, which, given the propensity of Americans to wax enthusiastic over newness for the sake of newness, generated a lot of unqualified zeal among geologists and related scientists. Just as the transformational theory was supposed to supply all the answers to the workings of language, so the theory of plate tectonics was supposed to explain all the whys of geology.

Using the theory of continental drift postulated in 1912 by the Austrian geophysicist Alfred Wegner, plate-tectonic theory has it that earth's outer mantle, a thickness of 60 miles or so, is irregularly cracked into nearly two dozen enormous plates that slip and slide about the globe at a rate of one or two inches a year like vast, driverless sleds in a demolition derby. On their broad turtlebacks they bear continents and oceans, and, through aeons, regions which were once polar become equatorial and vice versa. The Pacific plate, inexorably grinding against the American plate, has done a number of things, including creating our most titillatingly dangerous geological phenomenon, the San Andreas fault. Farther south, it crowded and slid beneath the South American plate, peeling off much of its own surface which buckled upward and became the Andes mountains. As one plate slides beneath another, it deposits some of itself on the other, which accounts for the presence of paleozoological fossils native to Asia in the mountains of British Columbia. And as the submerged plate dives even

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deeper, approaching earth's molten core, some of it melts and spews upward as volcanoes, creating land masses like the Hawaiian Islands.

One geologist who does not accept the plate-tectonic theory in toto is Anita Harris, the "heroine" of John McPhee's *In Suspect Terrain.* A world-recognized geologist, Harris subscribes to the basic soundness of the theory but, by way of author McPhee, she points out a number of geological puzzles, including certain aspects of the Appalachian range, unanswered by the theory. Her gripe is not against the theory but against those scientists of the bandwagon variety who fail to observe and analyze data with scholarly rigor. Unfortunately, fads can affect scientists as well as laymen.

Another American propensity, like the yen for newness, is the urge to get things done right now, be it winning a war overnight or showing a bottom-line profit on the corporate quarterly balance sheet. Largely because of this propensity, a number of publishing houses which used to produce quality literature—even though it wasn't immediately profitable—have been swept up by conglomerates and thrown into the dustbin. So, what is the bottom line on geology? What's in it for us? How can we turn an immediate profit in this science so reminiscent of Hindu cosmology in which a kalpa, a "day of Brahma," is 4320 million years long, and over many kalpas the earth is taken apart and put back together again?

John McPhee answers this question in *In Suspect Terrain.* Harris herself discovered a characteristic of differently located conodonts (tiny fragments of ancient marine animals) which ultimately provided a sort of "geothermometer" in the search for oil. When the OPEC-inspired oil crisis occurred in the early 70's, American oil companies used her discovery to zero in economically on new oil deposits. The bottom line. A moral could be, and probably should be, drawn here, something about government support for pure research—whether in astronomy, parapsychology, or geology. A scholarly curiosity, not a company petrogeologist's search, led Harris to her discovery. In the beginning she had no notion that her discovery would aid the country in its hour of need, but she worked for years on her own time and without benefit of government grants. Senator Proxmire regularly illuminates with fulsome irony how our government subsidizes patently ridiculous projects. There should be a way to separate the grain from the chaff, but given our ever-growing and often mindless bureaucracy, is such a salubrious solution possible?

John McPhee is a prolific writer who is able to transmute technical, sometimes arcane, subject matter into layman's language. His scope is Faustian; he obviously is a quick learner, and his knowledge is well digested. Unfortunately, not many readers of *In Suspect Terrain* will be as excited as the author at his encounter with a fresh road-cut exposing strata of prehistoric rock formations. Even McPhee's narrative skill and his clever knack of weaving relevant tales and anecdotes are not likely to sustain a lively interest in a lay reader. We

certainly need people like Anita Harris and we need people like John McPhee to write about them, but *In Suspect Terrain* is hardly a book to be read for relaxed enjoyment. It demands the close attention of a textbook. □

A Pathetic Macbeth

Thomas H. Cook: *The Orchids;* Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

Few speeches in Shakespeare are more often quoted than that spoken by Macbeth just before he is slain by Macduff. Yet his evaluation of life as an empty dream, an idiot's tale, must be seen within its dramatic context: this is, after all, the view of a manifold murderer nearing the end of a moral collapse. It is a more clear-sighted Macbeth who earlier perceives that "even-handed justice," not deranged idiocy, ultimately governs the course of the human soul and who therefore rightly fears that the virtues of the butchered Duncan "Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against/ The deep damnation of his taking off." As a former SS doctor who performed "medical experiments" upon hundreds of prisoners in a nazi liquidation camp, Peter Langhoff, the protagonist of Thomas Cook's *The Orchids,* has even more reason than Macbeth to fear the vengeance of pleading angels and deep damnation. However, though Langhoff first views the Camp as an approaching "Birnam Wood" and though he sees a Shakespearean fool in his only friend in the Camp—the Jewish lover of a homosexual German officer—he never achieves the transcendent vision essential to any tragic hero, even a murderous one like Macbeth. Hiding from the Israelis in a corrupt and underdeveloped Latin American country, Langhoff broods endlessly on the atrocities in which he took part, never embracing the easy excuses that solace his companion in hiding, Dr. Ludtz. In his pessimistic antiromanticism, Langhoff is totally blind to the possibility of human virtue, justice, or selflessness anywhere; from his perspective, life indeed looks like a furious, empty "tale told by an idiot." And unfortunately, though Mr. Cook is manifestly a writer of talent, his philosophic blinders seem to obscure almost as much as Langhoff's. The background on which he paints the doctor's dark reflections is itself wholly black. Nowhere does Cook depict the heroism of a Macduff or the purging of "black scruples" within a Malcolm; instead, he peoples his Latin Republic with priests, peasants, soldiers, and politicians who are so superstitious, corrupt, or avaricious that they often degenerate into caricatures, trivializing the moral issues of Langhoff's meditation. In the end, when Langhoff finally grows so weary of his life that he says "Enough" (as Macbeth never does) and deliberately seeks death at the hands of El Presidente's guards, the effect is one of pathos, not of tragedy. The world of tragic possibilities, to borrow a line from Hamlet, includes more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Cook's philosophy. (BC) □

Bang-Bang

Joseph Wambaugh: *The Delta Star;* William Morrow; New York.

Sam Koperwas: *Easy Money;* William Morrow; New York.

Ordinarily, people don't fling dirty epithets at writers while they are doing their jobs, nor do they shoot at them. It is, of course, a different story for police officers. Joseph Wambaugh, a former detective with

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the Los Angeles Police Department, knows that. Perhaps that's why he has penned a number of novels—really apologias for his former colleagues—instead of remaining on the streets. He also knows that most police officers aren't sanitized, telegraphic Joe Fridays nor trendy, tough-but-tender Kojaks. Thus, the men in blue portrayed in *The Delta Star* seem more realistic and less slick than their televised counterparts: these men are losers, cops on the edge, regulars at "The House of Misery" saloon. The world in which they work, the sleazy underbelly of L.A., appears to them to be quite mad; in that environment, Wambaugh shows that they, too, often become demented. Hence, one officer, whose job it is to protect citizens from criminals and to defend lives in general, combines the two charges and "resuscitates" a mugger, who had been knifed in the act of thievery, right into whatever afterlife awaits him. Norms become blurred, but there are still norms, if not readily apparent, then at least underlying the activities in Wambaugh's world.

The values in the world created by Sam Koperwas, as implied by the title *Easy Money,* refer only to material goods. There are two officers of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department in the book; both are shakedown artists. The law they abide by is one that upholds maximum profit at whatever cost. Koperwas was never a cop. He is a partner in a chain of jewelry stores in New Jersey, which may explain why he is more concerned with accoutrements than Wambaugh and less concerned with people. *Easy Money* is an excellent example of a book wherein form and content are distinctly separate: Koperwas is able to write quite effectively but the story goes nowhere except straight into a hole. We wonder—in the event of a robbery at one of his jewelry stores, who would Koperwas want: his demi-existentialist or one of the gritty guys from L.A.? The choice isn't an ideal one but neither are the abusive conditions under which real police officers must toil. □

Perceptibles

A. J. Quinnell: *The Snap;* William Morrow; New York.

If television had never been invented, spy novels would go a long way to filling in the time that the incandescent lamp makes available. The volume of books in the genre is such that one suspects that there is a vast audience which does not reside within the glowing blue realm of Nielsen. The volume also means that an author has to come up with books that will seize—there's no playing but rough playing—part of that audience. Two approaches, which were borrowed from the genre's big brother, highbrow literature, are to make the hero an antihero or to make the whole thing so fuzzy that right and wrong are, at their most distinctive, problematical. The results are uniformly unsatisfying. A. J. Quinnell's *The Snap* is a semi-entertaining spy novel. What is remarkable is that there are good guys and bad guys. What is astonishing is that in this story set in the contemporary world, the good guys are the Israelis. No wonder the author uses a pseudonym. Since the advent of Mickey Spillane novels and James Bond movies there has been a trap that authors of detective and/or spy novels can fall into: it's the snare of using too much violence or too much sex. Mr. Quinnell, unfortunately, puts them together, and enough is enough.

* * *

Ron Arnold: ***At the Eye of the Storm: James Watt and the Environmentalists;*** Regnery/Gateway; Chicago.

Given what we've read in the papers, we've constructed the following scenario of James G. Watt's daily trip to the Interior Department's headquarters. He hops into a huge gas-guzzler equipped with tanklike treads that totally chew up the flora; emissions from the vehicle are measured in parts-per-ten, not the standard parts-per-million. As often as possible he takes a different route. This is not to avoid kidnap by minions of the Sierra Club, but to give him ample opportunity to run over any and all wild and domestic animals that he may encounter, even if it requires traveling over someone's nicely kept lawn to do so. Should he notice a bird's nest in a tree, he immediately stops, climbs the tree, crushes the eggs, destroys the nest, climbs down the tree, removes a chain saw from his trunk, cuts down the tree, then makes a notation to call a polluting paper company to remove the vile object. On alternate weeks he goes by his grandmother's house to run her down. Upon arriving at work he resumes ordinary activities, like selecting "For Sale" signs for the Grand Canyon or questioning whether Puerto Rico should be turned into a landfill rather than a state.

Clearly, this is not what Mr. Watt does. The media—supposedly sophisticated, not the grocery-store-checkout variety —make it sound like these are the Interior Secretary's activities. He is, in their handling, extremist nonpareil. Ron Arnold's book, however, makes it clear

that perhaps the charge of fanaticism is applied to the wrong player. Of course, given standard journalistic practices, missing the broad side of a Rocky mountain is nothing new for the media.

* * *

Richard Curtis: ***How to be Your Own Literary Agent;*** Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

The cookbook is the number-one type of how-to book. Judging by the proliferation of fast-food restaurants, it's clear that the books are purchased more for picture-gazing than for practice. The number two of how-to's is the sex manual, which is also sought for graphic details. Such manuals, little more than guides to inventive pipe fitting, would probably be number one if it weren't for a vestige of scruples in the mass book-buying public to which the publishers of *Playboy, Hustler,* et al. have been laying siege for years. How-to books seem to be fairly pragmatic: books as tools. But cookbooks and sex manuals really appeal to secret desires that are rarely made manifest (certainly some

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use the books as a means to become a demi-Julia Child or an updated Don Juan, but they are rare). *How to be Your Own Literary Agent* is a handy, thorough book that panders to readers who are would-be writers, though it could be a tool for the bona fide practitioners who work to make it. Speculating, of course, is easier. Imagine: a write-up in the *New York Times Book Review* . . . a fight for paperback rights . . . Elaine's . . . the Polo Lounge . . . Meryl Streep . . . Clint Eastwood . . . □

WASTE OF MONEY

Potty Training in Print

Richard Price: *The Breaks;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

by Allen Brodsky

The most striking feature of this highly acclaimed new novel by a highly regarded young author is its baseness: both the dialogue and first-person narration are extraordinarily vulgar. The author's excuse for this is realist intentions: his characters are inner-city people, often poor and poorly educated, that is, people whose speech may be sprinkled with profanity. That not *all* people from this kind of background talk this way is not apparent from Richard Price's fiction. Besides being unpleasant and offensive, the vulgarity is often gratuitous and exaggerated; the dialogue frequently sounds just false. More important, the vulgarity serves no literary purpose: it reveals nothing about the characters that could not be better expressed otherwise, nor does it suggest any theme. Much of this vulgarity is meant to be funny (the narrator has an ambition to become a professional comic). Unfortunately, although the novel provides one or two laughs, the language and crudeness generally fail even as humor.

Lack of self-discipline and vagueness of ambition typify Price's characters, but he offers no ironic perspective on them. When the novel opens, the narrator, born in the Bronx, raised in Yonkers, and the first college graduate in his family, has just graduated from a fictional school obviously modeled on Price's alma mater, Cornell. Placed on Columbia Law School's waiting list, he moves back into his father's Yonkers apartment to work for a year before reapplying. While visiting with a college friend in a Columbia Law School student lounge, he decides against law school and abandons his planned future as a lawyer for rather frivolous reasons: he doesn't like his friend's new law-school manner and he doesn't like the looks of the lounge or the students.

A competent novelist can use a first-person narrative to reveal the depths and richness of a complex protagonist's inner life, but all Price's first-person narrative reveals is the young man's superficiality, his unjustified antagonism toward his college friends, his sexism, and his racism. The narrator describes women primarily by their sexual characteristics and relies on stereotypes to describe minorities ("a hot little chickie, a gymnastic-thighed sweet sixteen," "A Chinaman . . . started How Dow Cow Yowing into the receiver"). It is surprising that reviewers have not criticized Price's work for this. Perhaps stereotyping is acceptable if it is supposed to be humorous or realistic. Unfortunately, Price's "realism" results in stereotypes of the lowest order. And his narrator-protagonist is so self-centered—he isolates himself from his family and friends and ignores his religion and culture—that he has nothing to offer to anyone in the novel or to anyone who reads it. There is little value to a novel's representing in unrestrained detail an ethnic group's supposed manner of talking and behaving if that novel does not provide some greater perspective on its characters than they have of themselves. Because *The Breaks* lacks such perspective, displaying instead an extremely limited view of people and of storytelling, it is an ugly book. □

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Goodbye, Already

Ernest Lehman: *Farewell Performance;* McGraw-Hill; New York.

by Kathi Waite

A prime source of information about an author can be found on the dustcover of his book; through his accomplishments listed there, he hopes to earn the admiration of his readers. After one reads *Farewell Performance,* however, the brief biography of Ernest Lehman serves only to leave the reader confused, if not disgusted.

Farewell Performance might be called a "modern-day" love story. It involves identical twin brothers who despise each other too much to feel any love; any feeling either of them has for another person can only be described as bestial lust. Also included in this fairy-tale romance are a whore, an undiscriminating homosexual, a felon, and a lush who murders her lover in a jealous rage. The sex is so graphically detailed that one would be embarrassed to read it in a locked room; the language goes beyond the offensive. Add to these a shallow story line. The sum of these parts is an X-rated bomb.

The dustcover reminds us that Mr. Lehman is a six-time Academy Award nominee, the winner of more Best Screenplay Awards from the Writer's Guild of America than any other writer in the Guild's history, and the screenwriter for *The Sound of Music, West Side Story,* and *The King and I.* The juxtaposition of these accomplishments with what lies between the covers of the book transforms his novel into either a study in schizophrenia or a proof of debased conformism, often called the call of the market. □

Mrs. Waite is on the staff of The Rockford Institute.

Of Sacraments & Suicide

Cees Nooteboom: *Rituals;* Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge.

The question of meaning is finally a question of pattern. If no pattern exists "above" the flux of the temporal universe, then stable meaning is impossible and all human choices are finally and equally absurd. If, on the other hand, notions such as *good* and *evil* derive from an immovable ontological pattern, as the Judeo-Christian tradition teaches, then every man's behavior has valid meaning insofar as he makes it consonant with that pattern. In the solemnity of religious ritual, mankind affirms his faith in and

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commitment to such timeless patterns and thus expresses his confidence in the meaningfulness of all of life, including that outside of ritual. Of course, when faith and commitment wane, the stateliness of ritual seems nothing but arbitrary artifice. Rituals therefore then disappear or they survive only as degenerate relics idolatrously valued for their own sake, not as reflections of a deeper reality. Divorced from any perception of the supraworldly, rituals may even come to destroy rather than sanction the meaningfulness of life: certain strands of both existentialism and Eastern philosophy, for example, use their shared denial of the transcendent as a basis for justifying and even ritualizing suicide.

Indeed, in his novel *Rituals* Cees Nooteboom depicts with telling precision the sterility of rituals in the self-destructive lives of a stern existentialist and his recluse son, an Orientalist. Against these two foils, however, appears the protagonist Inni, who rejects not only their self-referential rituals, but all rituals suggesting order. Inni, in fact, repeatedly compares the existentialist's house to a "monastery" that "still smacked of church" and sees the son's presuicide tea ritual as a "last supper" officiated by "a Catholic after all." Inni peremptorily dismisses Christian faith, too, of course, despising the "masochistic son of the cruel Western god." He founds his own blasphemously irreligious religion upon the "soft, round rock" of a woman; sex being his principal ritual. And since he believes in no cosmic pattern, perceiving the universe as a "beloved" but "never acceptable" chaos, his ritual is chaotic, kinky, and promiscuous. Sex, the protagonist assures the reader, is not the object, "merely the delicious vehicle" for putting us in more immediate contact with the pos-

ited disorder. Like other modernists, Inni consequently finds all orderliness "frightening," resents people who give "precise answers," and hates "systems." The void is not terrifying but actually kind of cozily reassuring to a character or author trying to justify aimless hedonism.

If talent were the only measure of literary excellence, then the Mobil Corporation's decision to award their Pegasus Award for foreign literature to this work might perhaps be comprehensible. However, the vision guiding the talent must also be considered, and Nooteboom's vision is deeply suspect. Certainly, the prevalence of the values Nooteboom celebrates could only mean the demise of the socio-economic order permitting Mobil to exist. Having apparently lost their grip on the larger patterns of meaning, having surrendered control of a portion of their resources to an "independent" awards committee, Mobil's executives seem intent upon updating and Westernizing the ancient Oriental ritual of hara-kiri. (BC) □

Of Spys and Cynics

Ian Bush: *The Siberian Reservoir;* Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

It used to be that the reader could depend on spy novels to have several specific characteristics: 1) they were usually quickly and easily read; 2) they had readily identifiable good guys and bad guys; and 3) they invariably had a definite ending—the top-secret papers were retrieved, the President's life was saved, etc. The above assumptions should no longer be made automatically; by the time the reader finishes *The Siberian Reservoir* all three have been disproved. This book is one part biological thriller, one part spy novel, and one part cynical nonideology. Set in 1969, it unfolds a tale of a Soviet-developed "winning disease" discovered by genetically altering the common flu virus. This altered virus is to be unleashed on both China and the United States by way of infected pigs; it will supposedly disable both nations completely over a period of time, and it will be virtually undetectable as a foreign plot. Technological detail abounds; it is both tiresome and incomprehensible to the nonscientific reader. The spy-novel segments offer the standard fare of safe houses, "covers," "tails," strategies, hairbreadth escapes, plots, counterplots, and interrogations—often brutal ones.

But it is Dr. Bush's treatment of both the CIA and the KGB that causes puzzlement. As he sees it, the CIA is peopled mostly with incompetent recipients of the spoils system—leavened only here and there by men of skill, honor, and integrity. The primary worthiness of the American protagonists is that, although still employed by the CIA, they have essentially eschewed real spying in favor of science. Their days of active covert missions ended after World War II, a time when apparently it was ideologically acceptable to be an intelligence agent. These two shining white knights are forced to elude not just KGB operators but their own CIA and FBI people as well.

The KGB fares no better at the hands of Dr. Bush, but a rather curious shift in attitude occurs. At first, the Soviet agents are mostly vicious thugs with varying degrees of skill and perception. By the end, when KGB and Communist Party bigwigs are debating what to do about the U.S. knowledge of the Soviets' "winning disease," at least two of the group become exemplars of conscience. They order the "accidental" death of the scientist who developed the insidious strategy and proceed to use whatever means are necessary to defuse the dilemma and to insure that it never happens again. The implication is clear: although they want to win, it must be done at least semihonorably and not at *any* cost. In light of the Soviet "yellow rain" that drenches Cambodian peasants, such an assumption seems naive, not to mention absurd.

After the American hero is forced to retire and the communist henchmen return to their pursuit of the propagation of merciful Marxism, the reader is left to wonder if the two superpower intelligence agencies are really all that different. According to Dr. Bush, they are both filled with bad guys, the only gradation being that some are "badder" than others. *The Siberian Reservoir* seems to be more a novel of cynicism than one of suspense. (RW) □

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The Question Always With Us

***The Year of Living Dangerously;* Written by David Williamson, Peter Weir, and C. J. Koch (from the novel by C. J. Koch); Directed by Peter Weir; MGM/UA Entertainment Co.**

What Is to be Done? was published by Leo Tolstoy in 1884. The question is repeated by a dwarf; the fictional time and place are 1965 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The dwarf and the question made manifest were captured by Australian director Peter Weir in 1982. Weir's film *The Year of Living Dangerously* appears in many American theaters in 1983. What is to be done? Nearly 100 years after Tolstoy's formulation through the New Testament, 20 years after the repetition by the dwarf, the question remains to be answered. Peter Weir doesn't provide a solution, but he portrays the question more effectively than Richard Attenborough does in *Gandhi,* which essentially deals with the same concern. The implied object of the question is, of course, "for the poor." *Living Dangerously* operates on a number of levels. On one, the question of the poor is treated on a broad social scale. However, Weir doesn't succumb to the panoramic; he makes the question concrete by individualizing it: he shows the death of a single infant whose mother, like her peers on the edge of destitution, treats contaminated water as potable. One solution that is commonly offered up in the Third World—as shown in the film—for dirty water and little rice is communist revolution. Guns are shipped in; revolutionaries rise against Sukarno; the revolt fails. It isn't an answer; if it had succeeded it would have been, at best, a temporary palliative. In Weir's view, the people involved weren't driven by ideology but by hunger pains. Weir—think of his *Gallipoli*—isn't particularly enamored of Western colonialists, either. The Westerners shown in *Living Dangerously* are journalists and diplomats. With one exception, the journalists are "ugly." Westerners who are concerned with filing a good story, eating and drinking well, and rutting. The key man at the British embassy is shown as imperialists often are: treating the local people like animals and blowing on a bagpipe while feeding his overfed party guests oysters. While these characters may simply be considered to be caricatures, it must be kept in mind that a caricature must be based on identifiable characteristics. Such people, it's implied in the film, cannot or will not provide an answer.

Another level concerns individuals and love or its lack. The dwarf loves the mother and the child, yet it—and supplemental rice and money—does not save the infant. Sparrows still fall. A British woman, a positive character, loves the dwarf, but she cannot save him: his love for the dead child makes him, stupidly, embrace death. An Australian journalist, the exception among the boors, seemingly loves his work above all else. He cares, but still the story is the main objective. The dwarf, like a character from Durrell's *Quartet,* attempts to manipulate the Australian, to force him to love the woman. Such hubris—even if well intentioned—has just one punishment in the history of drama. Eventually the man does get his priorities in order; he and the woman leave the country. The people are still hungry. An implication that can be drawn from *Living Dangerously* is that there is no easy answer to What is to be done? With little or no genuine concern, the communists provide guns and the Westerners provide money. In the short term there may be positive results, but in the long run the answer is still elusive. Bureaucratic machinations are not enough. An answer, one found in both Western and Eastern religious traditions, is to love thy neighbor. It isn't easy to do, and material—as opposed to spiritual—failures do occur. But ultimately, perhaps, it is the only solution. Still, the magnitude of the question is such that none today will ever know the answer. (SM) □

Two Cheers for Mediocrity

***High Road to China;* Written by Sandra Weintraub Roland and S. Lee Postin; Directed by Brian G. Hutton; Warner Bros.**

One of the problems—perhaps *the* problem—in contemporary movie-making is that B-movies have almost entirely disappeared. B-movies were, of course, made to be cofeatures. Today, it's a rare (or porno) movie house that shows more than one feature. Part of the cause is economic: the dramatic increase in the cost of making pictures. Since many producers have to put big bucks into a movie, they figure that the result should be a big movie, even if the entire concept is microscopic. Thus, almost every movie emerges with bleating fanfare. The cacophony is exceeded only by the banality of the productions. On the other side there are the low-low-

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budget movies, which are one of two types. First, there is the movie about the family in the mountains and their love of and struggles with nature. Second, and more predominant, is the gore movie, wherein imaginative mutilations are key. Basically there exists, overall, a bipolar situation: "grand" (sic) movies and garbage.

High Road to China is a mediocre movie. Thus there is something to be said for it. It is light entertainment: adventure (sometimes contrived) dominates the plot; humor is evident while seriousness isn't. It could have easily turned into a variation on Blake Edwards's *The Great Race* (1965) as countless other period movies did (*High Road to China* is set in the late 20's), but Mr. Hutton avoids that cheap pitfall. This movie could mark the return of ordinary movies (not *films*), but it's unlikely: too many want to grow up and be George Lucas and too many others want to show that punk a thing or two. More's the pity. In this age of extremes, it's a good feeling to be able to chew popcorn and watch a mediocre movie. (SM) □

The Agony and Some Dentistry

***Sophie's Choice;* Written by Alan J. Pakula (based on the novel by William Styron); Directed by Alan J. Pakula; Universal Pictures.**

Serious consideration was given to skipping *Sophie's Choice.* But, as Mr. Styron gave a nod to the film—an extraordinary event in that fuzzy area that separates Novel-land and Hollywood—as one of the better American actresses performs in the film, and as we are driven by a prickling of conscientiousness, we gave in. We also visit our dentist on a regular basis. The dental visit is typically painful but worthwhile. *Sophie's Choice* lacks the latter characteristic. □

Agitprop Division: Hollywood

by Herbert I. London

Ever since the Committee of Ten and the subsequent publication of Victor Navasky's *Naming Names,* Hollywood and its many subsidiaries have been in the throes of an anti-anticommunist ground swell. This movement, which began as a modest effort to counter extremely naive interpretations of communist sabotage, has become a frontal assault on almost all aspects of bourgeois-capitalist culture—its economic system, military policies, and cultural values. A film director may not always have a direct and easily discernible message, but he will have a message.

In some respects 1982 is a landmark year since the film campaign against our society has hit the financial jackpot. Propaganda pays. Before I overstate the case, let me point out that although Costa Gavras's *Missing*—a misguided and misleading attack on CIA activities in Chile—was not a financial success in the U.S., it was a box-office smash in Europe. Its theme is consistent with current rhetoric at European universities and the suppositions of the Green Party in Germany. However, the films that count financially and artistically are targeted at the values of Western culture and, from the looks of things, have hit the bull's-eye. Let me begin my list of the five most propagandistic films of 1982 with the one that will be the biggest financial success in the industry's history: *E.T.*

This film by Steven Spielberg, which is advertised as appealing to the child in everyone, is an attempt to characterize government officials as heartless creatures and to attribute to the extraterrestrial an intelligence, sensitivity, and warmth that presumably we cannot find in ourselves or our neighbors. The film begins with the alien and friends engaged in plant reculti-vation; a more benign activity for "save the earth" types cannot be found. Appearing on the scene are some ominous characters whose faces are not seen, but whose motives are perfectly clear from the close-up of their keys. These are the captors—government captors it turns out—with ice running through their veins and a malevolent yen to experiment on these creatures from outer space in their thoughts.

E.T. is thus a combination of teddy bear, St. Francis, and Wernher Von Braun. He can be a doll at one moment, a loving saint the next, and then a scientist reaching across the galaxy to contact his friends. What more can one ask from this

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Dr. London is a dean at New York University, a director at the Hudson Institute, and the author of the forthcoming Closing the Circle: A Cultural History of the Rock Revolution.

I Disagree

by Stephen Macaulay

Although well-intentioned, Dean London's examination of what he terms "the five most propagandistic films of 1982" is an example of the kind of polemicizing that should be dropped from the agendas of conservative individuals and organizations if they intend to partake in *serious* cultural discourse. First, the form. It is the popularity list, the kind of thing that makes *People* magazine possible. "In" or "out," "hit" or "miss," or, in *People* parlance, "Picks & Pans"—all of these are meant to be organizational poles which are ready-made and already hung with the current artistic fashion. No personal cerebration is required. The message is: here's what to think; believe us. The selection of the worst—Dean London's approach—is just the

Mr. Macaulay reviews movies for the Chronicles.

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obverse of the same coin and thus has the same value. Second, the content. It is remarkable that Dean London is so dismissive of *Missing*. Costa-Gavras, the man who also directed *Z* (1969), is openly an ideological enemy; he is a serious foe and should be addressed as such. That *Missing* was not a "box-office smash" in the U.S. doesn't mitigate the destructive power of the movie. The few, the elite, always form policies; the masses follow. Instead of coming to grips with a serious foe, Costa-Gavras, Dean London launches into an attack on what are featherweights by comparison and employs techniques reminiscent of Marxist literary criticism: one part mind reading (vide Marx and Engels on Balzac) and one part metaphysical twisting of innocent facts. As I have covered four of the five films Dean London lists in *Chronicles*, my comments will be brief.

The attack on *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* is the most astonishing. Certainly the film is open to interpretation. It is a testimony to Steven Spielberg's abilities as a filmmaker that *E.T.* can support multiple interpretations. Dean London's most serious problem is that it portrays government officials as enemies to little aliens and little children: it is, he thinks, "a snide swipe at . . . American authority." My interpretation is somewhat simpler. Spielberg is simply portraying the adult as authority figure, a characterization that is a convention in fairy tales. Remember Peter Rabbit? That little brown creature was chased by a very large man who made a particular noise as he walked, one that sent Peter scurrying. Peter knew that if he didn't hop, he would be cut up for a stew or pie. I've yet to hear *Peter Rabbit* characterized as an antiauthoritarian story, but there it is, with all of the elements of *E.T.* Peter Pan didn't want to grow up because he knew that if he gave up the magical ability to believe in fairies he would become a humorless adult who would undoubtedly have problems with films like *The Wizard of Oz* (Dorothy as anarchist? Gore Vidal has raised the point of her possible seditious nature and his wit is notably lacking) and *E.T.*

The female disguise seems to disturb Dean London most about *Tootsie*. The man in women's clothing has had a long and respectable history in the theater, and because Milton Berle had a penchant for pumps doesn't negate that history. While the film does have a pro-E.R.A. message, Dean London, I think, misses the point of the scene he offers as evidence. Isn't Hoffman's repentance actually a ploy? The woman he addresses is one that he has been, correctly, lusting after throughout the film. His words are ones he knows will win her and thus permit him to ungirdle his hormones. His, it seems, is a variation on "But I *really* love you" spoken in the backseat of a car, not the feminist sniveling of an Alan Alda or Phil Donahue. As for *Gandhi* and Solidarity: as far as I know, its "symbolic acts and demonstrations" (e.g., the cross in the Gdansk shipyard and the general strikes) have been most effective. Communist thugs can't defeat people who wear pictures of the Virgin on their lapels; thugs can crush those who act in kind. Dean London is right and wrong about *The Verdict*. Correct in his general interpretation. His selection of detail is wrong. In cases when a search for truth is being made, a search with serious effects on human lives, isn't it possible that the sanctity of a U.S. Postal box could be violated? Finally, the attack on *Garp*: basically, Dean London is correct. But surely he exaggerates. That "millions" will experience a sea change from the interpretation of Irving's garbage is unlikely. Thousands, perhaps. □

London

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interplanetary angel? His adversaries, however, conceal their eyes with inhuman masks and their insensitive actions with jargon-laden language. Who are these pursuers of arbitrary law and order? NASA officials; yes, the same people who brought you a step on the moon are now characterized as the Brown Shirts of intergalactica. No wonder U.N. representatives thought this film was so noteworthy; it simply confirmed their vitriolic assumptions about the United States. This film is not only a symbol of friendship across the solar system, it is also a snide swipe at government authority generally and American authority specifically.

If *E.T.* is the United Nations film of the year, *Tootsie* is the E.R.A. vision of tomorrow. What is ostensibly a five-minute transvestite sketch for the old *Show of Shows* has been converted by director Sydney Pollack into a statement for the so-called women's movement. Dustin Hoffman, who dresses in drag to secure a part on a soap opera, comes to appreciate how badly women are manipulated by chauvinistic men wishing to gratify their egos at the expense of unwary females. Hoffman comes to see the wickedness of his ways and, in a "tenderhearted" moment at the end, demonstrates to a woman that he fully appreciates the difficulties women face. Never again will he flex his machismo psyche at singles' parties; he has been converted. Another victory for androgyny; another sexist vanquished. *Tootsie* has done for feminists what *Kramer v. Kramer* did for single-parent families. With the success of this film another nail is driven into the coffin of differentiated sex roles.

Perhaps the most successful artistic accomplishment of the year belongs to Richard Attenborough and his film *Gandhi*. This is indeed a film of grandeur which, in part, explains why it is so pernicious. The photography and acting are so compelling that one is tempted to gloss over the message. However, Attenborough can't resist his instinct for didacticism. Again and again the viewer is reminded that passive resistance works. As the screen version of Gandhi notes, "Even in the case of Hitler I would practice these methods; for in the long run tyrants fail." I should like to think Gandhi was right about the "long run," albeit the jury is out on that question. But what

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about the short run? Is an extermination camp fertile ground for the practice of passive resistance? Does one quote Gandhi in the gulag? Is the pressure applied on the British government in the form of symbolic acts and demonstrations maneuvers that can be successfully adopted by Solidarity? What concerns me about this film is that it provides ammunition for the antinuke, propacifist adherents and, significantly, may affect fence sitters on the issue of nuclear-weapons deployment in Europe. One cannot underestimate the influence of the visual media, especially when the director has an ax to grind. If the upshot of this film is that large portions of its audience believe that passive-resistance tactics are appropriate to our present condition, then the slide into tyranny may not be far removed.

Next on my hit list is *The Verdict,* a film with all the clichés of *Rocky II* and *The Paper Chase* rolled into one loud cheer for the underdog. Paul Newman plays a hard-drinking Boston lawyer who is having difficulty compromising his values for the legal vultures who make the rules. Along the way Newman tilts swords with an unscrupulous panjandrum of the legal profession who will do anything to win his case. James Mason, who plays this antagonist's role very effectively, says, "I get big fees because I win." This is the logic of Vince Lombardi: "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." But in this case, the loser wins. On the face of it, there is nothing particularly wrong with seeing an underdog win—I'm all for that. Nor do I have any gripe with the critical portrayal of lawyers. What is troubling is the director's view that *no one* plays by the rules —not lawyers, not doctors, not even Newman, who breaks into a mailbox to secure evidence for his case. No one is untainted. The moral of this story is that when no one plays by the rules, the rules can be ignored. This is moral relativism with a vengeance. The director seems to be proclaiming: "Laws were meant to be broken." At the end of this film one wonders: Justice for whom? What laws can be defended? Here is a cynic's impression of a brave new world without common norms, morality, or even simple decency.

The last of the top five is also among the most tasteless films I've ever seen. *The World According to Garp* is John Irving's joke on the *New York Times Book Review* and the Hollywood *glitterati.* This is inhuman satire that pokes fun at every conceivable bourgeois convention and involves—with various degrees of seriousness—castration, sex change, self-mutilation, masturbation, and murder. There is no topic spared in John Irving's perverse imagination. If this perversion were kept within the covers of his financially successful book, I would be annoyed but not outraged. The young are more inclined to see video pornography than print pornography. However, since this story has been adapted into film and degrades the millions who have and will see it, I cannot contain my dismay. At the risk of hyperbole, I would describe Mr. Irving's book as a comprehensive assault on middle-class sensibilities. It is designed to shock until you've been shocked so often that there is nothing left but some form of acceptance and, in some instances, bemusement. But this is not a comedy, nor is it satire in the usual sense, notwithstanding the silly comments in the *New York Times.* This is degradation in which the human spirit is reduced to a scatalogical depiction in living color.

What these propaganda films demonstrate is that the campaign to undermine America is in full swing in the land of Norman Lear. I cannot prove a causal relationship between the message in these films and social despair, but I am confident in suggesting that these films play a part in it. This is not an argument—I should hastily note—for censorship, although the well-being of any social system is based on literary tastefulness and social order. What I am contending is that the film industry has lost any semblance of balance. It is what Daniel Bell called a cultural contradiction of capitalism. It is a revolutionary force aiming its ardor at the youthful consumers of mass cult. □

The American Proscenium

Affirmative-Action Election

The mayoralty race in Chicago had plenty to do with race, of course, and it would be futile to go once again into the validity or nefariousness of those rudimentary passions that accounted for the contest's by-now-familiar image. Yet what and how much was made of its more intricate aspects? To our mind, no convincing assessment had been formulated as of election day on the pernicious abuse of the commonsensical symmetries which, after all, for better or worse, rule the basic sensitivities of us all—black and white alike.

Actually, what was at stake this time was neither racial nor party politics, but the notion of how we administer absolution for venial sins in the public domain. Overblown as it may sound, that facet of the ganglion of issues, which predicated the election, may decide the direction into which both our civilization and democracy are moving. We agree that a man's complexion may govern some political emotions on a visceral level, but we suspect that unfairness—a slightly bland word at first sight—when perceived as a structural flaw of the social environment, can bring some dispositions to a state of boiling hatred. Mr. Washington's candidacy was widely perceived by Chicago's white population—regardless of party affiliation—as something wildly, monstrously unfair. Only Chicago blacks and white liberals, who accounted for his victory margin, were blind to this factor. This makes us quite pessimistic. Blemishes, even de-

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fects, in a gifted politician's spiritual equipment are nothing new: history is replete with impressive leaders who had to be forgiven for various moral failures in order to accomplish their missions: we all know, after St. Augustine and Shakespeare, that there is another person within a person, one who often merits another hearing. However, the conflict between a political double standard and the democratic ethos shouldn't be approached through open mockery, through flaunting duplicity as an organic element of the social fabric. Unfortunately, that's exactly what happened in Chicago, and the villains are the liberals and the media. Black chauvinism should not be excused, but it is pardonable. The liberal cynicism—touted as service to some kind of by-now-abstract justice—is reprehensible. If we are heading toward a new American reality in which an examination of Nixon's underwear or Kissinger's trash can, put on the front page by liberal investigative reporting, determines the fate of Presidencies, but in which "forgetting" to pay taxes three years in a row is viewed with ideological sentimentality, then some social convulsions are inevitable. Since our beginning, there have always been some instrumental and tenacious conventions in American politics that, regardless of their structural credibility, served us well: a politician must abide by some standard of lawfulness in order to survive as a democratically elected official. This time, the liberals and the media shredded that principle, standing in the limelight and gleefully scoffing at law. We'll have to wait and see how we'll live with this novelty.

For some time, we've been reading in the press about the political and social maturity of American blacks, of that ample minority's newly acquired civic skills, its ability to participate in the democratic process, its growing aptitude for working within and through the system. Those analyses and observations are correct—and very welcome. However, the Chicago election seemed to us a sort of a setback. It is a dire truth that since the late 1960's blackness has been, in the eyes of many, equated with crime, welfare, and social decay. This may be a tragically unjust, even ugly, stereotype, yet more-or-less overt revanchism ("We want it all!" "It's our turn!") will do nothing to defeat that image as it should and must be defeated. In Chicago, black agonies, sensitivities, and mostly justified grievances have been given a luxury cosmetician's, or a chiropractor's, treatment, while white ethnic/working-class fears and perplexities have been approached with a club by the liberal media. People were bludgeoned into embracing the "antiracist" liberal platitudes. The result will be an ever more pervasive feeling among a very large part of this society that the blacks will have to undertake an honest reevaluation of their post-civil-rights-struggle attitudes, the same process of transvaluation that continuously occurs among the whites since Dr. Martin Luther King made his ineradicable impact on modern America. If that rethinking is not done, then two types of bigotry—and antibigotry as well—will clash at random, turning this civilization into a caricature.

There was a lot of talk that President Reagan's triumph spelled the end of the Roosevelt coalition. One recession and 11 percent unemployment were enough to dispel such an illusion. Yet in Chicago, in April 1983, a sociopolitical phenomenon more important than the blue-collar

disenchantment with Carter seems to have occurred. What the bingo operators of voting in both the Democratic and Republican Parties will do about that phenomenon is hard to predict, knowing the narrow-mindedness of both. So actually, aside from the lakefront liberals, the most ominous force to emerge from the Chicago spectacle is the media. A young acquaintance from Poland, a survivor of the persecutions against Solidarity, confided to us his impression of the first serious democratic struggle he witnessed in his new country. "I escaped the unimaginable terror of leftist mediocrities in Warsaw," he mused, "only to witness the victory of Mr. Washington, an obnoxiously leftish mediocrity. I heard him delivering a rebuttal to Reagan's address on education in which the President, with the support of unassailable statistics, proved the catastrophic deterioration of the American school system under the thumb of the Federal bureaucracy. Mr. Washington was selected by the Democratic Party as its spokesman, presumably to boost his image before the election. He didn't say a word about Mr. Reagan's figures. He lambasted the President for his intervention in El Salvador. Oh, how well I know this mentality and dialectics from Jaruzelski's newspapers and television!"

And how did the media, that supreme White Knight Defender of the people's right to know, tackle *this* side of Mr. Washington's persona, career, posture? Not a word about it. Instead, the new natural law—that an imperfect black must be rated as better than a not-too-perfect white in America of the 1980's—was hammered into the consciousness of Chicagoans with all the brainwashing power of the *Chicago Tribune's* hypocrisy, the *Sun-Times'* greed, and countless electronic commentators' lowbrow bellowings. Their coverage slavishly reflected the liberal tenet that people is not people but what the white liberal *says* is people. That's the same white liberal for whom cocaine is recreation, who sees hard-core porn on cable TV as a triumph of the First Amendment, con-

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siders the PLO better than Begin, and venerates Studs Terkel as a social sage.

Well, in the end, it may turn out to be propitious for us that the media made themselves so conspicuously brazen: all over America, hatred of the media is on the rise, and the Chicago episode will help. Sooner or later, the trees in Lincoln Park will be ornamented with swinging effigies of editors whose naked despotism and casuistry will eventually propel people into the streets in pursuit of justice for the decades of reckless media oppression of the collective mind. □

You Were Right (After All), Senator McCarthy

Mr. Michael Whitney Straight—an American blue blood, aristocrat patrician who is heir to enormous wealth, the progeny of the most influential caste, an epitome of the Establishment, a Cambridge University alumnus—has written a book in which he admits to being a longtime Soviet spy, and that his activities probably resulted in the deaths of thousands of American soldiers in Korea. Instead of being branded as a cheap scoundrel, or simply being ignored, he has been accorded lengthy reviews in our daily press, weekly magazines, and intellectual journals, many of which dwell sympathetically on the plight of a split personality, understandable human failures, and other enigmas of democratic existence. Perhaps the only moral enlightenment in the book comes from an episode in which Mr. Straight confesses his sins, crimes, and contemptibleness to FBI officers, one of whom happens to be the son of a gardener on the Straight estate on Long Island, a recipient of his cast-off clothes decades ago. He is now a defender of the Constitution, democracy, and freedom, all of which Mr. Straight has soiled by his mere presence among us. Something even more telling, however, is how right that quintessential simpleton was, that plebeian senator from Wisconsin who stubbornly kept repeating that commie bastards were dug into the highest reaches of this republic's power structure. At that time, Mr. Straight was a high official in the State Department and a White House speech writer. □

JOURNALISM

Oh, What a Christian Monitor!

In a shamelessly biased report on the by-now-infamous conference "Vietnam Reconsidered," held not long ago at USC in Los Angeles, one Stewart McBride, identified as "staff correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor," shrilly brings back all the 1960's antiwar clichés. We do not know exactly what Christian Science considers "truth" or how its staffers monitor it, but *this* piece of journalism makes us shudder. To judge from this piece, Christian Scientists seem to have discerned a method of separating "truth" from "fact" that will certainly help them advance in the realm of radical virtues, but it makes us wonder how far the perversion of the adjective "Christian" and the noun "Science" can go. Here is what Mr. Seymour Hersh, who is well known for treating both fact and truth with the same reverence as sausage manufacturers treat their ingredients, had to say at the conference:

> 'I don't think that the press was very relevant to the Vietnam war. For all that good reporting the government still gets away with lying. Nothing we've done in Watergate or Vietnam has changed any of that.'

Mr. McBride concludes in a tone of emphatic support for a view which reveals how his Christian-Scientific journalistic ethics is constructed:

> Washington shares 'at least as much' of the blame as Hanoi for the condition of Vietnam today, said John MacAuliff, a former antiwar activist who has served for the last 10 years as director of the Indochina Program of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Had the United States honored the Paris peace agreement and provided reconstruction aid, as postwar polls showed two-thirds of the American people favored, Vietnam would be a different place today, he said. The proceedings of the 'Vietnam Reconsidered' conference are to be published in the coming year as a textbook by Harper & Row. The book advances and royalties have been donated by USC through AFSC to a health clinic in Ho Chi Minh City.

To the best of our modest knowledge, we have honored the Paris peace agreement, while the Hanoi communists had raped and torn it to shreds even before the ink had dried. And those American Friends who were so sweetly mentioned seem always to serve a Brezhnev or an Andropov dutifully but never the occupant of the White House, whatever his party affiliation. All of which makes the distinguished organ that employs that kind of staff correspondent seem less a monitor and more a dispenser of lies. And apparently, nothing that American liberal journalism has done in Watergate or Vietnam will ever change that. □

Lower Mathematics and *The Nation*

It has long puzzled us how the intellectuals at *The Nation* managed to successfully complete such courses as Political Science 101 back in the days when they were leading their local John Reed Clubs. A recent article in its pages has brought to light another field of study ignored: lower mathematics. While we make no claim to absolute expertise in the field, we can confidently execute that bane of elementary school students everywhere: the story problem. The article in question excoriates General Motors for the manufacturing agree-

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ment it reached with Toyota. The premise is, of course, that what's good for G.M. is bad for the nation—and *The Nation.* The story problem presented is the following:

> The venture also won't do much good for the employment rolls. In Fremont, California, it will create 3,000 jobs in a plant where 6,000 workers used to punch in.

Let's simplify it for *The Nation.* A general once had an army with 6000 soldiers. For some reason—perhaps he stopped being an imperialist or a mercenary—he had to let all of his men go: 6000 minus 6000 equals 0. At a future date the general required the services of a number of men—perhaps the CIA gave him a contract—3000, to be exact: 0 plus 3000 equals 3000. The question (and this is always the tricky part) is this: How many soldiers have billets? The answer: 3000. No matter how you twist it, it's still far better than the preagreement 0. □

Grandma, the Stooge

In the interminable debate of heredity vs. environment, score an equivocal tally for heredity. To disprove the *Washington Post's* charge that the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is being manipulated as a "stooge group" by the Soviets in its rabid disarmament fervor, the Andropov-adoring *Nuclear Times* recently published an article entitled "Grandma Should Know," pointing out that *Post* publisher Donald Graham has now withdrawn the charge and adding:

> Graham should have known better from the start. In 1961 his grandmother, Agnes Meyer, a member of the WILPF, ran a WILPF-sponsored seminar . . . on Soviet-American Women. Twelve women were brought over from the Soviet Union to participate.

That Mr. Graham could not stand by his originally accurate perception suggests that perhaps the pull of defective genes was too strong for him. However, that the editors of *Nuclear Times* actually believe they have discredited rather than corroborated that perception reveals that the worst brain defects are not congenital. □

Values

A brilliant case of revolutionary internationalism is presented by the existence of one Daniel Singer—allegedly of Polish origin, living in France and writing boring semicommunist copy for America's *The Nation*—a proud bastion of pro-Soviet cosmopolitanism in Manhattan. In a recent article in which he defines himself as "somebody unfashionably [??? (we didn't think one mark of interrogation could express our astonishment—*CC*)] interested in the radical transformation of society," he describes one Polish movie:

> I thought that the principal characters —a German, a Polish Jew and a Polish Catholic—were equally revolting specimens of capitalists; all of them exuded the ugly smell of success.

Naturally, had they exuded the sublime fragrance of failure, the world would be better, and the angelic Marxist-Leninist faith, which materializes through oppression, starvation, and the occasional killing of millions, could then find its own, superlogical, beatific rationale for that failure. □

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